

**Representations of Paternal Child Killing in English National  
Newspapers, 1900 to 1939**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the newspaper coverage of a sample of 402 cases of paternal child killing committed during the period 1900 to 1939, as identified in a selection of seven English national newspapers. Five main research strands are considered in this thesis: the representation of paternal child killers; the representation of violent crimes; understandings of mental illness; conceptualisations of fatherhood; and the development of the national press. Firstly, it is argued that paternal child killers were not represented in a uniform way. Variations in newspaper coverage were determined by the biographies of paternal child killers, explanations for killing their children, reception by the public, factors involved in breakdowns of mental health, and the punishments they received. The second research strand concerns responses to and representations of violent crime. The newspaper coverage of paternal child killing is a useful source to explore attitudes to violent crime in the early twentieth century because it was not an 'everyday' crime and had sensational appeal to journalists as a news story. The third research strand of this thesis examines understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. Newspaper accounts of paternal child killers whose sanity was in question reveal how different actors, such as the paternal child killer themselves, lay witnesses, medical experts, and legal professionals, understood mental illness and criminal culpability. The fourth research strand looks at conceptualisations of fatherhood and masculinity, particularly focussing on the centrality of economic provision. This thesis highlights how narratives of perceived failure to live up to expectations were used to explain why men killed their children. The final research strand explores how the national press changed over the period 1900 to 1939. This thesis looks at the length of coverage per case, per article, and per newspaper to assess how the selection of seven national newspapers reported on paternal child killing, how this changed over time, and what this reveals about newspaper reporting during the early twentieth century.

## **Introduction**

This thesis explores the newspaper coverage of a sample of 402 cases of paternal child killing committed during the period 1900 to 1939, as identified in a selection of seven English national newspapers. Paternal child killing has been the focus of several pieces of historical inquiry covering the period 1860 to 1922 in varying depth.<sup>1</sup> For this study the period 1900 to 1939 was chosen because of the existing historiography. Due to the availability of legal sources, such as the Old Bailey Sessions Papers, the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been the focus of attention, leaving the years of the First World War and the interwar period largely untouched. An examination of newspaper representations of paternal child killing demonstrates how such instances were packaged and presented for readers. The term 'paternal child killing' refers to reported cases of murder, manslaughter, and neglect in which the killer was the victim's father, stepfather, or assumed a paternal role in the child's life, for example, in a relationship with the child's mother. The term 'child' is used to refer to the 'daughter or son of' the accused man, legitimate or otherwise, and includes both infants and adults. The keyword search used to construct the sample of cases examined in this thesis brought up cases in which the 'child' was an adult son or daughter. This thesis addresses five main research themes: representations of paternal child killing; violent crime; understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability; expectations of fatherhood and masculinity; and the development of the national press.

Firstly, this thesis addresses how paternal child killers were represented in a sample of seven national newspapers in the period 1900 to 1939. It is argued that paternal child

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<sup>1</sup> See D. Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales, 1870-1950', in H. Barron and C. Siebrecht (eds.), *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c.1870-1950: Raising the Nation* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2016), pp. 73-92, G. Frost, ' "Such a Poor Finish": Illegitimacy, Murder, and War Veterans in England, 1918-1923', *Historical Reflections*, 42 (2016), pp. 91-111, D. Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Roehampton University, 2008), and J. Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure: Discharging Child-Murderers from Broadmoor and Perth Criminal Lunatic Department, c. 1860-1920', in M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002), pp. 216-248.

killers were not represented in a uniform way. Variations in newspaper coverage were determined by the biographies of paternal child killers, explanations for killing their children, reception by the public, factors involved in breakdowns of mental health, and the punishments they received. Individual circumstances of the paternal child killer need to be taken into consideration. This thesis demonstrates that, apart from in the period 1914 to 1918, there was no single response to paternal child killing, and paternal child killers did not receive uniform treatment in the press. The chronological overlap with existing studies allowed for consideration of aspects of continuity and change in the factors used to explain paternal child killing and how it was represented. Historians have argued that economic factors formed a core explanation for paternal child killing.<sup>2</sup> What this thesis demonstrates is that it was not just economic hardship but the very thought of it that was a key factor. Short-term unemployment could be just as damaging as chronic long-term unemployment. There was a fear of poverty or financial ruin resulting from unemployment or under-employment because of pressures to provide and embarrassment about being unable to do so. The tendency to focus on paternal child killing borne out of economic hardship obscures instances that were committed by fathers of relative wealth, who had suffered financial loss or were plagued by doubt about their business success, and were fearful of losing their financial security. Overwhelmingly, newspaper journalists were sympathetic to unemployed and financially-distressed fathers who killed their children and were understanding of the damaging consequences of restrictive definitions of masculinity.

The second research strand concerns responses to and representations of violent crime. The newspaper coverage of paternal child killing is a useful source to explore attitudes to violent crime in the early twentieth century because it was not an 'everyday'

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<sup>2</sup> See A. Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London, 1889-1913', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Monash University, 2016), p. 223, J. Shepherd, 'Victorian Madman: Broadmoor, Masculinity and the Experiences of the Criminally Insane, 1863-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Queen Mary University of London, 2013), p. 181, and C. Wilson, 'Mad, Sad or Bad?: Newspaper and Judicial Representations of Men Who Killed Children in Victorian England, 1860-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Essex, 2012), p. 32.

crime and had sensational appeal to journalists as a news story. It was also a domestic crime, usually committed in the private space of the home, allowing access to the intimate lives of people affected by this violent act. Since court records were unavailable for most of this period, due to the 100-year rule, newspapers only allowed access to a proportion of cases of paternal child killing.<sup>3</sup> This means that the total number of charges, convictions, and punishments brought against paternal child killers could not be ascertained but general trends in the treatment of these men could be determined. These general trends were then contextualised using Judicial Statistics for England and Wales for the period 1900 to 1939. More importantly, for this study the attitudes of the general public to paternal child killing could be approached through the newspaper coverage.

The newspaper coverage reveals that there were discrepancies between the legal punishment for murder – death – and the actual punishments paternal child murderers received – life imprisonment in a prison or criminal lunatic asylum – if the defendant was found guilty but insane, a discrepancy also commented upon by Daniel Grey.<sup>4</sup> It is argued in this thesis that verdicts of guilty but insane became more common over the period 1900 to 1939 and that punishments for convicted paternal child murderers became more lenient. Cathryn Wilson contends that although pleas of insanity were not always successful at the point of sentencing they appear to have provided a ready social and medical answer as to why men committed child murder.<sup>5</sup> Alesha Lister, meanwhile, argues that the courts were willing to accept insanity pleas on behalf of men characterised as loving fathers rather than to convict on a capital indictment.<sup>6</sup> This thesis contends that verdicts in paternal child murder cases were increasingly likely to result in a finding of ‘guilty but insane’ due to wider

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<sup>3</sup> Under the Data Protection Act 1998 records that contain personal information about an identifiable living individual are to remain closed for 100 years. See National Archives, *Access to public records* (December 2015), <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/information-management/access-to-public-records.pdf> [accessed 12 October 2018].

<sup>4</sup> Grey, ‘Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales’, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> Wilson, ‘Mad, Sad or Bad?’, p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> Lister, ‘Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide’, p. 195.



debates concerning the purpose of punishment. As Janet Weston argues, in the early- to mid-twentieth century faith in traditional punishments, such as the death sentence and lengthy prison sentences, diminished and there was increasing focus placed on ascertaining whether the defendant was mentally culpable for the crime.

The third research strand of this thesis examines understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. As highlighted above, access to court records, typically used to explore use of the insanity plea is largely restricted in the twentieth century due to confidentiality and privacy. Newspapers, therefore, permit access to the way in which mental illness and criminal culpability were understood over the period 1900 to 1939 by a variety of people, not just medical men and lawyers. Newspaper accounts of paternal child killers whose sanity was in question reveal how different actors, such as the paternal child killer themselves, lay witnesses, medical experts, and legal professionals, understood mental illness and criminal culpability. Additionally, the newspaper coverage of such cases illustrates the extent to which these accounts were mediated and manipulated by newspaper editors and journalists to make the information accessible and understandable to a general readership.

While the mental health of paternal child killers has been discussed in the existing secondary literature, attention to understandings of mental health in relation to criminal culpability and how these understandings were disseminated to the public using newspapers, have not received in-depth consideration. By examining the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers in the early twentieth century and exploring how lay, legal, and medical understandings of crime and mental health were packaged for public consumption this gap in the literature is addressed. It is beneficial to consider understandings of mental health in relation to paternal child killing, as well as violent crime more generally, since it sheds light on what behaviour was seen as 'insane'. It also allows us to consider the way in which breakdowns in mental health were comprehended during this

period, and whether this changed after the First World War, a time characterised by historians as one of change regarding the conception, treatment and perception of mental health both in medicine and wider society.<sup>7</sup>

In this thesis it is argued that the mental health of paternal child killers was presented in the newspaper coverage in a way that was understandable to lay readers. Medical professionals were given a voice in the newspaper coverage but it is clear that lay interpretations of mental illness and criminal culpability dominated in the articles, although this did change over time. It is also argued that the testimony of medical experts was edited by journalists according to the assumed level of medical knowledge of their readers. In the first chapter, which looks at the period 1900 to 1914, comparisons are made between the trial transcripts of cases tried at the Old Bailey and the associated national press coverage. This demonstrated the extent to which journalists edited their accounts of court proceedings for newspaper articles. The analysis of Old Bailey trial transcripts also highlighted how journalists used the evidence of medical experts for discussions of criminal culpability in newspaper articles and, by association, how much interest a general readership had in this type of testimony. At the beginning of the period more attention was paid to lay witness testimony and lay understandings of mental illness. In the final chapter, examining the period 1930 to 1939, it is argued that there was an increase in readers' desire for medical knowledge.

The newspaper coverage of cases in which the paternal child killer's sanity at the time he killed his child was in question highlighted the theories used to explain breakdowns

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<sup>7</sup> See S. Grogan, *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War's Legacy for Britain's Mental Health* (Pen and Sword: Barnsley, 2014), W. Bonikowski, *Shell Shock and the Modernist Imagination: The Death Drive in Post-World War One British Fiction* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Farnham, 2013), L. Stryker, 'Mental Cases: British Shellshock and the Politics of Interpretation', in G. Brayban (ed.), *Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914 to 1918* (Berghahn Books: Oxford, 2003), pp. 154-171, and B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (Jonathan Cape: London, 2000). Fiona Reid challenges the generalisation that the First World War was the first time that men had been traumatised by warfare in *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-30* (Bloomsbury: London, 2010).

in mental health. This thesis demonstrates that lay witnesses, medical experts, and the journalists reporting on the cases relied on older conceptions of the causes of mental illness and that these remained fairly consistent throughout the period 1900 to 1939. Further, it is argued that references to some causes and concepts of mental illness ceased to be in circulation but rarely were new ones added, many persisted despite new concepts taking on prominence in the field of mental health. There were some discrepancies between the language used in legal contexts (and in the associated press reports) and wider developments in the field of psychiatry. There was also a delay between new ways of conceptualising mental health in psychiatric medicine, their recognition by individual medical practitioners and acceptance by legal professionals, such as judges and barristers. At the beginning of the twentieth century specific medical concepts and contemporary ways of thinking about mental health and criminal culpability were not as prevalent in the newspaper coverage as lay and legal understandings. By the 1930s there was greater inclusion of medical terminology and less reliance on legal understandings of mental illness.

The clear distinctions between medical, legal and lay understandings of mental illness have been taken for granted in the existing literature on the role of medical experts in the courtroom.<sup>8</sup> Newspaper articles about paternal child killers whose sanity was questioned provide evidence that certain terms and concepts were not used solely by one type of witness. There was a sharing of knowledge and a transfer of understandings between medical, legal, and lay witnesses. The testimony of medical experts, in particular, was informed by the legal requirements of an insanity plea and lay concepts of insane behaviour so that their testimony could be understood by both legal professionals and the jury.

Cathryn Wilson asserts that it was only when expert medical opinion was not available that

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<sup>8</sup> J. Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock: Defending the Diagnosis, 1760-1913* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2016), J. Eigen, 'Diagnosing Homicidal Mania: Forensic Psychiatry and the Purposeless Murder', *Medical History*, 54 (2010), pp. 433-456, and T. Ward, 'Observers, Advisers, or Authorities? Experts, Jurists, and Criminal Responsibility in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 12 (2001), pp. 105-122.

newspapers relied on the testimony of neighbours, relatives and friends to explain the character and frame of mind of a paternal child killer prior to the crime.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to Wilson's contention, my research demonstrates that not only was the testimony of lay witnesses as important as that of medical experts but that lay understandings influenced the way in which medical experts framed their testimony and how this was reported in the newspaper coverage. Medical testimony was not the sole authoritative voice on what constituted criminal culpability, especially in newspaper reports.

The fourth research strand looks at conceptualisations of fatherhood and masculinity, particularly focussing on the centrality of economic provision. The extent to which the expectations to live up to these ideals was damaging for some men and fathers has been explored in the secondary literature. This thesis further highlights how narratives of perceived failure to live up to expectations were used to explain why men killed their children. It also shows how detrimental these expectations were to the mental health of some fathers by examining the regularity with which economic difficulties were referred to in the newspaper coverage. Although men who killed their children contradicted ideal fatherhood journalists did not overtly criticise fathers for this. Instead, portrayals were mainly sympathetic and in many cases fathers who killed their children were presented as having carried out the ultimate act of paternal devotion. If it could be shown that fathers had tried to fulfil the damaging expectations placed on them then a more sympathetic view was likely to be taken of the case.

Fathers who fulfilled other expectations, such as protector, educator, and carer, also received sympathetic portrayals in the newspaper coverage. Through accounts of the lives of paternal child killers prior to the crimes, the newspaper coverage also offers an insight into the behaviour as men as fathers. Historians of masculinity have begun to consider the domestic environment in relation to fatherhood, in recognition that men did not live solely

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad or Bad?', p. 150.

outside the family home.<sup>10</sup> Many of the fathers in this sample were not depicted as violent, many had been affectionate to their family, expanding the view of what was appropriate masculine behaviour, and lending to sympathy to the accounts of their crimes. Depictions such as these further complicated legal and public reactions to paternal child killing, leading it to be considered an act of insanity. As Daniel Grey argues, if a paternal child killer appeared to embody the central tenets of ideal fatherhood and masculinity (provider, protector, carer, nurturer, playmate, and educator) then it was easier for this crime to be seen as an act of insanity and for sympathy to be given by the court and in the associated newspaper coverage.<sup>11</sup>

The final research strand explores how the national press changed over the 40-year period under analysis. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a massive expansion of the popular press due to growing literacy, changes in the format of newspapers, most notably tabloids, and a growing consumer market. Although both Alesha Lister and Cathryn Wilson use newspaper articles to analyse representations of paternal child killers neither author examines the extent of newspaper reporting per case in their sample or even by newspaper. This may be due to the larger sample size used in their studies, and the higher number of newspapers used to construct their samples, but it does seem like a crucial oversight in studies which consider newspaper representations. By contrast, this thesis looks at the length of coverage per case, per article, and per newspaper to assess how the selection of seven national newspapers reported on paternal child killing, how this changed over time, and what this reveals about newspaper reporting during the early twentieth century. It is argued in this thesis that although cases of violent crime, such as paternal child killing, remained a staple of newspaper news up until the Second World War, the First World War had a huge effect on how the cases were reported. During the

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<sup>10</sup> See L. King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015) and J. Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England', p. 482.

period 1900 to 1939 the layout of newspapers also changed and this was reflected in how articles were constructed and written. Through the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing it can be seen what was and what was not permissible to report at certain times.

The first chapter of this thesis discusses the specialist secondary literature which my thesis contributes to and challenges, as well as some of the wider literature which informed and influenced my arguments. The second chapter sets out the methodology used to construct the sample and examine the newspaper coverage, as well as some of the problems I encountered during this process. The third chapter is the first of four core analytical chapters which are organised chronologically. For each chapter, general trends in the data from a sub-sample of cases are identified and the ways in which paternal child killers were represented in the newspaper coverage are then analysed in more depth. How the mental health of these men was discussed and understood, and the extent to which fatherhood and masculinity were invoked in these representations are also examined.

Chapter three analyses a sub-sample of 223 cases taken from the period 1900 to the outbreak of the First World War on 28 July 1914. Since many of the existing studies on paternal child killing cover this period, this chapter reflects on their findings through a comparison with my own data. It also provides new insight into the interplay of different understandings of mental health and criminal culpability by using the records of the Old Bailey to ascertain the extent to which journalists condensed the testimony given at the trials of paternal child killers in newspaper articles. In this chapter it is argued that variety characterised the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing. Additionally, the type of man likely to kill his child and the legal treatment of paternal child killers, i.e. the punishment they received, was not uniform. There was not a stereotypical paternal child killer in this sub-sample as there were too many differences between the cases to presume how one case would be treated in comparison to the next.

In chapter four the years of the First World War, 29 July 1914 to 11 November 1918, are examined. Although the sub-sample of 17 cases analysed in this chapter is smaller than the other time periods, it allows for an examination of the impact of the First World War on news reporting and public reactions to violent crime. Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson, and Samantha Pegg argue that during the First World War instances of everyday crime disappeared from the newspapers in favour of war news.<sup>12</sup> It is contended in this thesis that even cases of violent, domestic crime were virtually erased in this four-year period in an attempt to keep up morale on both the Home and Western Fronts. This obviously had implications for the content of the few articles on paternal child killing that did get published. Unlike the previous chapter, cases of paternal child killing in the sub-sample examined for this chapter were treated in a more uniform manner, both in the newspaper coverage and by the legal system.

The fifth chapter explores a sub-sample of 87 cases from 1919 to 1929. The legacy of the First World War became more apparent in the post-war period and took on a central role in this chapter. Assumptions about the extent of change wrought by the First World War are challenged in this chapter, particularly concerning the impact of the conflict on recorded instances of crime, the brutalisation of men as a result of army service, and whether understandings about mental illness were adapted in light of wartime lessons. There were a higher number of soldiers in this sub-sample but this is indicative of the number of young men who fought in the First World War rather than a proclivity for ex-soldiers to commit violent crime. The effects of the post-war recession on men who became unemployed as a result are also considered. Although the post-war recession did not have as far-reaching and long-lasting consequences as the economic Depression of 1929 to 1933, because of the centrality of economic provision to fatherhood during the period there were negative implications for unemployed fathers and their children.

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<sup>12</sup> J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson and S. Pegg, *Crime News and Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2013), p. 133.

Chapter six, the final analytical chapter, analyses 75 cases from 1930 to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. The long-lasting effects of the First World War on the mental health of ex-soldiers and the psyche of national newspaper readers are explored in this chapter. Additionally, the way in which the economic Depression of 1929 to 1933 was used to explain cases of paternal child killing is also considered. This chapter also determines the extent to which understandings of mental illness had changed by the late 1930s in light of theoretical developments. Finally, the chapter reflects on changes in national newspaper reporting of violent crimes in comparison to the earlier time periods. The average length of newspaper articles relating to cases of paternal child killing became shorter by the 1930s and it is argued that violent crimes did not interest the readers of national newspapers in the same way they once had. New forms of crime, such as motor crime and gang-related crime, were now of greater interest to newspaper readers.



## **Chapter One: Literature Review**

Infanticide and child murder are crimes that have traditionally been gendered as female leading to a tendency for historians to look solely at female involvement, dismissing men or alluding to them as co-conspirators.<sup>13</sup> However, there is a growing body of literature that focuses on fathers who were charged with in the crimes of infanticide and child murder. Paternal child killing has been explored in a variety of ways. Due to the availability of nineteenth-century court records, there has been a concentration on the legal aspects of paternal child killing, such as the crimes fathers were charged with and the punishments they received.<sup>14</sup> Records from criminal asylums, such as Broadmoor, and the Home Office have been used to examine paternal child killers who were found guilty but insane and were detained in criminal lunatic asylums rather than sentenced to death.<sup>15</sup> Paternal child killing has also been explored in relation to ideal fatherhood and the extent to which fathers

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<sup>13</sup> D. Grey, ' "Agonised Weeping": Representing Femininity, Emotion and Infanticide in Edwardian Newspapers', *Media History*, 21 (2015), pp. 468-480, N. Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822-1922: News Narratives in England and Australia* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2013), D. Grey, ' "Almost Unknown Amongst the Jews": Jewish Women and Infanticide in London, 1890-1918', *The London Journal*, 37 (2012), pp. 122-135, K. Watson, 'Religion, Community and the Infanticidal Mother: Evidence from 1840s Rural Wiltshire', *Family and Community History*, 11 (2008), pp. 116-133, T. Hager, 'Compassion and Indifference: The Attitude of the English Legal System Toward Ellen Harper and Selina Wadge, Who Killed their Offspring in the 1870s', *Journal of Family History*, 33 (2008), pp. 173-194, T. Ward, 'The Sad Subject of Infanticide: Law, Medicine and Child Murder, 1860-1938', *Social and Legal Studies*, 8 (1999), pp. 163-180, A. Higginbotham, ' "Sin of the Age": Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London', in K. Garrigan (ed.), *Victorian Scandals: Representations of Gender and Culture* (Ohio University Press: Athens, Ohio, 1992), L. Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Great Britain 1800-1939* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1986), and G. Behlmer, 'Deadly Motherhood: Infanticide and Medical Opinion in Mid-Victorian England', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 34 (1979), pp. 403-427.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London, 1889-1913', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Monash University, 2017), D. Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales, 1870-1950', in H. Barron and C. Siebrecht (eds.), *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c. 1870-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 73-92, and D. Grey, 'Discourse of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Roehampton University, 2008),

<sup>15</sup> See G. Frost, ' "Such a Poor Finish": Illegitimacy, Murder, and War Veterans in England, 1918-1923', *Historical Reflections*, 42 (2016), pp. 91-111, J. Shepherd, ' "One of the Best Fathers Until He Went Out of His Mind": Paternal Child-Murder, 1864-1900', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), pp 17-35, J. Shepherd, 'Victorian Madman: Broadmoor, Masculinity and the Experiences of the Criminally Insane, 1863-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Queen Mary University of London, 2013), and J. Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure: Discharging Child-Murderers from Broadmoor and Perth Criminal Lunatic Department, c.1860-1920', in M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002), pp. 216-248.

received sympathetic treatment because they had previously fitted the mould of a 'good father'.<sup>16</sup> Factors used to explain these cases, such as financial pressures, jealousy, ill-health of the child, and the mental health of the paternal child killer, have been analysed in depth using legal and medical sources, alongside newspaper articles pertaining to individual men.

The historiography of paternal child killing explores paternal child killing, in varying depth, from the beginning of the nineteenth century up until 1922, which marked the passing of the 1922 Infanticide Act. The most heavily covered decades are those of the Victorian period. This is not surprising given the wealth of nineteenth-century material produced as a result of industrialisation and increased centralisation of justice.<sup>17</sup> Additionally mass digitisation of sources has allowed researchers to collate data on crime, offenders, and their punishment much quicker.<sup>18</sup> The opening up of archival material relating to the early twentieth century means that new routes of historical investigation can be explored. This study, therefore, re-examines cases of paternal child killing committed in the first two decades of the twentieth century and extends the analysis to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. This provides a chronological framework with which to analyse paternal child killing in terms of continuity and change both over the period 1900 to 1939 and with the nineteenth century. As well as the historiography of paternal child killing this literature review also addresses crime and punishment in the twentieth century, the development of the tabloid press, twentieth century fatherhood, the interplay of gender and mental illness, and mental illness and criminal culpability. Looking at these areas of historical study is crucial to understanding newspaper representations of paternal child killers and their sanity.

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<sup>16</sup> See Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide', Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales', pp. 73-92, and C. Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?: Newspaper and Judicial Representations of Men Who Killed Children in Victorian England, 1860-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Essex, 2012),

<sup>17</sup> Z. Alker and L. Williams, 'Digital Detectives: Sources for Studying Crime History', in J. Hogg (ed.), *Using Primary Sources: A Practical Guide for Students* (Liverpool University Press and University of Liverpool Library: Liverpool, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Additional bodies of secondary literature are examined in each of the core analytical chapters when appropriate.

### **Paternal Child Killing**

The first part of the literature review considers the historiography of paternal child killing and the ways in which existing studies have examined notions of ideal fatherhood, the use of the insanity plea, and how paternal child killing was represented in newspapers. A chronological approach is taken to this literature to demonstrate how the historiography has developed and, thematically, where this study contributes. A prominent theme in the literature is the extent to which ideological, social and cultural pressures of fatherhood motivated men to kill their children and led to successful invocation of the insanity plea. The way in which these pressures were used by legal professionals, medical experts and the press to make paternal child killing more explicable and how they impacted on mental health are also key features of the historiography. An evident gap in the literature is how lay, medical and legal understandings interacted to produce findings of guilty but insane and how understandings of mental illness in relation to violent crime were packaged for newspaper readers. This is important since it sheds light on why some insanity pleas were successful and others not, the evolving role of medical expert testimony in criminal trials, and the impact of medical theories on findings of insanity. There has been a shift in the historiography of child murder away from infanticide and towards studying paternal child killing. This has been part of a larger trend to examine not only the experiences of mothers in the family context but also fathers, which is explored later in this literature review.

Daniel Grey explores the role of fathers in child homicide between 1870 and 1950 by examining cases in relation to ideas about 'good' and 'bad' parenting.<sup>19</sup> Although Grey was

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<sup>19</sup> Grey, 'Discourse of Infanticide' and Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales', pp. 73-92.

not the first historian to acknowledge paternal child killing he was the first to give it sustained attention and explore it any detail.<sup>20</sup> Men's trials for the murder of their children, much like women's, were heavily influenced by ideas about what constituted normative and deviant behaviour by fathers.<sup>21</sup> When a defendant otherwise fitted the criteria for 'model fatherhood' the judge and jury were convinced to take a more lenient view of a man accused of killing his child.<sup>22</sup> Although Grey's work broadens our understanding of English fatherhood, men only account for 9 per cent of the sample used in his PhD and reference is only made to two instances of paternal child killing in his subsequent book chapter. This means that there is scope for additional investigation into representations of men who killed their children in the period 1900 to 1939.

Jade Shepherd draws on 60 cases of paternal child killers who were certified insane and sent to Broadmoor, a criminal lunatic asylum, between 1864 and 1900.<sup>23</sup> Her article enriches research on nineteenth-century fatherhood by showing that working class fathers were expected to be hardworking, temperate providers for, and protectors of their children.<sup>24</sup> Shepherd contends that paternal child killers acted contrary to gendered expectations of fatherhood, just like women who killed their children contravened expectations of motherhood.<sup>25</sup> In agreement with Melissa Gregory, Shepherd argues that working class fathers killed their children because they had internalised the role of protector

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<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Conley briefly discusses men who killed their children in Britain during the nineteenth century, *Certain Other Countries: Homicide, Gender, and National Identity in Late Nineteenth Century England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales* (The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2007), pp. 178-183. See also Ward, 'The Sad Subject of Infanticide', pp. 163-180, which examines men as well as women who killed their children out of a fear of poverty, stressing similarities between paternal and maternal experiences. Katherine Watson states that men are one of three groups who have been overlooked in the history of new-born child murder but does not examine them in her article, 'Religion, Community and the Infanticidal Mother', pp. 116-133. Elaine Farrell considers the role of fathers in Irish cases of infanticide, ' "The Fellow Said It Was Not Harm and Only tricks": The Role of the Father in Suspected Cases of Infanticide in Ireland, 1850-1900', *Journal of Social History*, 45 (2012), pp. 990-1004.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>23</sup> Shepherd, 'One of the Best Fathers until He went Out of His Mind', pp. 17-35. See also Shepherd's PhD thesis 'Victorian Madmen'.

<sup>24</sup> Shepherd, 'One of the Best Fathers until He went Out of His Mind', p. 19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

and provider to such an extent that the murder of their children was the only alternative left to them.<sup>26</sup> Shepherd contends that newspapers ignored other factors, such as poverty, which may have induced men to kill their children and instead focussed heavily on their sanity, a feature of the newspaper coverage which appears to have changed by the twentieth century.

Cathryn Wilson examines newspaper and judicial representations of 570 men who killed children between 1860 and 1900, though not all were the fathers of the children or even related to them.<sup>27</sup> Contrary to Shepherd, she states that poverty and insanity became entrenched within the discourse of paternal child murder and that by the end of the nineteenth century poverty was understood to be one of the causes of male insanity.<sup>28</sup> Much like Grey, Wilson finds that newspaper representations tended to be sympathetic if the father had shown a degree of respectability prior to the crime.<sup>29</sup> Since Wilson's PhD research ends in 1900 it serves as a central point of comparison with my own research.

Ginger Frost analyses two cases of paternal child killing involving First World War veterans and their illegitimate children.<sup>30</sup> In her study she argues that by 1925 war service became less influential on the punishment of these fathers and the treatment they received in the national press.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, she argues that as the war moved further into the past their war service counted for less in the eyes of judges, juries and the public. In this thesis Frost's argument is challenged by using a larger sample of cases of ex-soldiers who killed their children in the post-war period. The validity of war service as an explanation for violent crime is also explored by Zoe Alker and Barry Godfrey, who argue that the depiction of ex-

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21 and M. Gregory, ' "Most Revolting Murder By a Father": The Violent Rhetoric of Paternal Child-Murder in *The Times* (London), 1826-1849', in J., Thorn (ed.), *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender and Print, 1722-1859* (University of Delaware Press: Delaware, 2003), pp. 70-90.

<sup>27</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad or Bad?'.  
<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>30</sup> Frost, 'Such a Poor Finish', pp. 91-111.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

soldiers as victims became less desirable as the Second World War became imminent.<sup>32</sup>

Frost's, and Alker and Godfrey's, argument overlooks the lasting resonance of service in the First World War and the extent to which the public remained reverential of those who fought in it.

The association of masculinity with providing in the context of paternal child killing is also explored by Margaret Arnot in her study of early nineteenth century parental child homicide.<sup>33</sup> Much like Wilson and Shepherd, Arnot argues that many men were found guilty but insane for the murder of their children due to sympathy triggered by men's failure to live up to the expectation to provide for their families.<sup>34</sup> Constructions of masculinities were unstable and varied, but there was a historic long-term continuity in the association of masculinity with providing for families.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, there is a long history of sympathy for paternal child killing in certain circumstances that runs parallel with the story of judicial sympathy for women committing newborn child killing.<sup>36</sup>

Alesha Lister also considers masculinity and fatherhood in her analysis of 360 cases of child homicide tried at the Old Bailey between 1889 and 1913, 120 of which involved men but not all of whom were the father of the child.<sup>37</sup> Lister claims that the majority of the men were working class Londoners and were portrayed as extreme examples of working-class masculinity and fatherhood.<sup>38</sup> Men's failure to fulfil their paternal role of economic provider struck hard at many men's masculine identities even when it was acknowledged that the reason for their unemployment was beyond their control.<sup>39</sup> Lister's insistence that paternal

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<sup>32</sup> Z. Alker and B. Godfrey, 'Soldiers and Victims: Conceptions of Military Service and Victimhood, 1914-45', in R. McGarry and S. Walklate (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and War* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2016), p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> M. Arnot, 'Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide in English Popular Visual Culture, 1800-1850', *Law, Crime and History*, 1 (2017), pp. 16-74.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>37</sup> Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide'.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

child killing was mainly committed by working-class men obscures the fact that there were middle-class men who also killed their children. Additionally the centrality of unemployment to her argument diminishes the role under-employment, intermittent employment, economic loss, and financial worry played in paternal child killing and the implications for constructions of fatherhood.

## **Crime and Punishment in the Twentieth Century**

Since paternal child killing was often a violent crime, it is important to put the findings of this thesis into context of the historiography of violent crime and its punishment in the early twentieth century. Discussions about the 'dark figure' of unreported crime, the impact of the First World War, and the effects of high levels of unemployment on reported instances of crime in the late 1920s are considered in this section. The history of crime and punishment in the early-to-mid twentieth century, especially the punishment of violent crime, has received less attention than that in the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, these studies have not yet been carried out due to access sources. Many 'official' sources are not yet available due to the 100-year rule which prohibits access to material of a sensitive nature.<sup>40</sup> In an attempt to address this oversight David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday's edited collection explores murder committed in the twentieth century.<sup>41</sup> Kilday claims that homicide is a neglected subject of study, particularly in the twentieth century.<sup>42</sup> Where the literature does exist, its focus is on gory recreations of the murder scene instead of examining the historical context of a murder case with a view to crime prevention.<sup>43</sup> Kilday contends that homicide cases which did not receive much press attention tend to be

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<sup>40</sup> See 'Introduction' Footnote 3 for a discussion of the 100-year rule.

<sup>41</sup> D. Nash and A. Kilday, (eds.), *Murder and Mayhem: Crime in Twentieth Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018).

<sup>42</sup> A. Kilday 'Britain's "Most-Wanted": Homicide and Serial Murder since 1900', in D. Nash and A. Kilday (eds.), *Murder and Mayhem: Crime in Twentieth Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018), p. 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

overlooked by historians too.<sup>44</sup> Looking at a sample of 402 cases of paternal child killing, which received both sensational and scant levels of newspaper coverage, aids in rectifying this oversight.

One way historians have sidestepped the issue of access to 'official' sources is by using newspapers, since information in newspapers is already in the public domain. Cases of murder were relatively rare but received the most press coverage in comparison to petty crimes. Clive Emsley states that it was representations of crime in the press that determined the cultural impact of crime rather than experience of crime itself.<sup>45</sup> This is also commented upon by Barry Godfrey who states that popular narratives shaped the public opinions of prosecuted crimes.<sup>46</sup> David Nash and Anne-Marie Kilday take this one step further and argue that newspapers often acted like an additional and sometimes alternative form of justice within British society.<sup>47</sup> Newspaper coverage of violent crimes also served as morality tales and instructed newspaper readers as to what would happen if they contravened social norms. As Shani D'Cruze contends many sensational murder trials were domestic or courtship homicides because they fed a widespread middle class fascination with stories of respectable families gone awry.<sup>48</sup>

Historians have debated the extent to which reported instances of crime and the number of crimes investigated by the police reflected actual levels of crimes being committed.<sup>49</sup> Howard Taylor argued that between 1914 and 1960 the criminal statistics of

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>45</sup> C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England* (Pearson Education Limited: Harlow, 2011), p. 152.

<sup>46</sup> B. Godfrey, *Crime in England, 1880-1945: The Rough and The Criminal, The Policed and The Incarcerated* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2014), p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> A. Kilday and D. Nash, 'Introduction: Crime and Punishment in Twentieth Century Britain', in D. Nash and A. Kilday (eds.), *Murder and Mayhem: Crime in Twentieth Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018), p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> S. D'Cruze, 'Intimacy, Professionalism and Domestic Homicide in Interwar Britain: The Case of Buck Ruxton', *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007), p. 701.

<sup>49</sup> See Godfrey, *Crime in England, 1880-1945*, J. Wallis, 'Lies, Damned Lies and Statistics? Nineteenth Century Crime Statistics for England Wales as a Historical Source', *History Compass*, 10 (2012), pp. 574-583, J. Archer, *The Monster Evil: Policing and Violence in Victorian Liverpool* (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2011), Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England*, J. Archer,



England and Wales did not reflect the actual amount of crime but were manipulated by different authorities depending on local and national pressures.<sup>50</sup> Barry Godfrey disputes Taylor's contention that financial pressures in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reduced the rate of all serious crime, since there is no evidence of this policy in Home Office papers.<sup>51</sup> However, in a more recent study he does agree that criminal statistics were filtered through criminal justice institutions which may have reasons to 'skew' the statistics for their own purposes.<sup>52</sup> Like Clive Emsley, who maintains that the police had their own agendas in recording instances of crime, Godfrey attributes the fall in violent crime at the end of the nineteenth century to the police, who came to exert more control over recorded crime due to the central role in detection and their management of the prosecution process.<sup>53</sup> While newspaper accounts of crime cannot resolve this issue, and arguably it is made more complicated since not all crimes were reported on by newspapers, they can indicate which crimes were thought to be newsworthy.

The influence of gender on the punishment of those accused of violent crime has been the focus of several studies on crime and punishment. In *Men of Blood*, which examines the punishment of men in the Victorian period, Martin Wiener concludes that men were punished more harshly than women for violent crime because male violence was seen

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'Mysterious and Suspicious Deaths: Missing Homicides in North-West England (1850-1900)', *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés*, 12 (2008), pp. 45-63, B. Godfrey, 'Changing Prosecution Practices and Their Impact on Crime Figures, 1857-1940', *British Journal of Criminology*, 48 (2008), pp. 171-190, J. Carter Wood, 'Criminal Violence in Modern Britain', *History Compass*, 4 (2006), pp. 77-90, J. Carter Wood, *Violence and Crime in Nineteenth Century England: The Shadow of Our Refinement* (Routledge: London, 2004), J. Archer, 'The Violence We Have Lost? Body Counts, Historians and Interpretations of Violence in England', *Memoria Y Civilizacion*, 2 (1999), pp. 171-190, H. Taylor, 'Rationing Crime: The Political Economy of Criminal Statistics since the 1850s', *The Economic History Review*, 51 (1998), pp. 569-590, H. Taylor, 'The Politics of the Rising Crime Statistics of England and Wales, 1914-1960', *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés*, 2 (1998), pp. 5-28, M. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990), and V. Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-State', in F. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950, Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990), pp. 243-310.

<sup>50</sup> Taylor, 'The Politics of the Rising Crime Statistics of England and Wales', pp. 5-28.

<sup>51</sup> Godfrey, 'Changing Prosecution Practices and Their Impact on Crime Figures', p. 178.

<sup>52</sup> Godfrey, *Crime in England, 1880-1945*, p. 29.

<sup>53</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England*, p. 18 and Godfrey, *Crime in England, 1880-1945*, p. 45.

as uncivilised.<sup>54</sup> Barry Godfrey *et al.* look at the punishment of men and women convicted of minor assaults in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>55</sup> They, too, find that women who committed similar assaults to men were likely to receive a lighter punishment and that the gender of the accused played a significant part in determining the sentence imposed.<sup>56</sup> Using a case study approach Ginger Frost also examines the interplay of gender and punishment in the early twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Frost analyses the case of Kitty Byron who murdered her married lover during the Edwardian period and reveals that Byron received sympathetic treatment by the courts, the press and the public. Frost argues that Byron benefitted from being a woman, the weaker sex, and from her partner's failure to live up to masculine norms through his sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, bad fathering, and violence to both his wife and Byron.<sup>58</sup> However, as detailed above the notion that men received harsher punishments than women has been challenged, particularly in the context of paternal child murder. Cathryn Wilson argues that not only did men charged with the murder of their children face execution less regularly than men charged with the murder of other victims but that they were frequently found guilty but insane, just like women who murdered their children.<sup>59</sup>

## Crime and the Twentieth-Century Press

Pertinent to this study of newspaper representations of paternal child killers is the history of the press itself. Newspapers, both national and local, have been the focus of several studies

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<sup>54</sup> M. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004), p. 5. See also M. Wiener, 'Convicted Murderers and the Victorian Press: Condemnation vs. Sympathy', *Crimes and Misdemeanours: Deviance and the Law in Historical Perspective*, 1 (2007), pp. 112-118.

<sup>55</sup> B. Godfrey, S. Farrall, and S. Karstedt, 'Explaining Gendered Sentencing Patterns for Violent Men and Women in the Late-Victorian and Edwardian Period', *Journal of Criminology*, 45 (2005), pp. 696-720.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 716.

<sup>57</sup> G. Frost, '“She is But A Woman”: Kitty Brown and the English Edwardian Criminal Justice System', *Gender and History*, 16 (2004), pp. 538-560.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 547.

<sup>59</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 225.

on the history and development of this form of print media.<sup>60</sup> The press underwent several changes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: many newspapers introduced the tabloid format and broadsheets were no longer the only kind of paper on offer in the early twentieth century; human interest stories became more popular; and reader numbers were at an all time high by the later interwar period.<sup>61</sup>

Historians of crime have examined how newspaper editors and journalists exploited cases of violent crime to appeal to this desire for human interest stories. Newspapers have been widely used in studies of crime since many national and local titles have been digitised and are keyword searchable. In the context of the nineteenth century, John Archer and Jo Jones argue that the Victorian period set the agenda for the representation and reportage of violent crimes through highly explicit and detailed descriptions of murder victims and their wounds.<sup>62</sup> Violent incidences that contained a human interest story were highlighted because they suggested wider social threats, as such, murders, assaults and other crimes against the person consistently made headline news.<sup>63</sup> Reports of some crimes took on the hallmarks of fiction, deploying narrative, melodrama and plot which were played out to a reading public.<sup>64</sup> Readers were thus able to play the role of spectator and voyeur from the comfort of their own homes.

Judith Rowbotham and Kim Stevenson have also looked at the role of the press in constructions of what constituted criminal behaviour, both legally and socially.<sup>65</sup> They argue

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<sup>60</sup> See A. Bingham and M. Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to Present* (Peter Laing Ltd: Oxford, 2015), J. Carter Wood, *"The Most Remarkable Woman in England": Poison, Celebrity and The Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012), A. Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life and the British Popular Press, 1918-1978* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009), J. Rowbotham and K. Stevenson (eds.), *Criminal Conversations: Victorian Crimes, Social Panic, and Moral Outrage* (The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2005), and A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Carter Wood, "The Most Remarkable Woman in England", p. 68.

<sup>62</sup> J. Archer and J. Jones, 'Headlines from History: Violence in the Press, 1850-1914', in E. Stanko (ed.), *The Meanings of Violence* (Routledge: London, 2003), p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>65</sup> Rowbotham and Stevenson, (eds.), *Criminal Conversations*.

that newspaper representations of crime provide wider insights into how Victorian society actually operated.<sup>66</sup> The Victorians regarded the role of newsprint as crucial in promoting and mediating mass consent to the operation of the legal system and accompanying sociocultural processes of identifying and punishing transgressors.<sup>67</sup> Rowbotham and Stevenson also recognise a second function of newspapers' inclusion of stories on violent crime: to sell newspapers. Newspaper titles known to feature storylines of crime and bad behaviour in abundance sold well to audiences.<sup>68</sup>

Martin Wiener suggests that the press played an increasing role in the criminal justice process, namely through publicising criminal acts, reporting trials, and discussing sentencing.<sup>69</sup> As newspaper audiences became bigger in the nineteenth century, national and local newspapers devoted more space to reports on crime and trials, and, in doing so, tended to become more active in seeking mercy for those condemned to die.<sup>70</sup> The press became a venue for contending different points of view on guilt, responsibility and punishment. The press also became an important player in its own right in the struggles over whether or not to execute condemned murderers.<sup>71</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century newspaper clippings were sent to Whitehall along with judge's reports and other official documentation.

Rosalind Crone has examined the development of the Victorian press and editors' recourse to stories of violent crime in the context of popular entertainment.<sup>72</sup> Narratives of violence, especially those about brutal murders, attracted great interest.<sup>73</sup> During the

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<sup>66</sup> J. Rowbotham and K. Stevenson, 'Introduction', in J. Rowbotham and K. Stevenson, (eds.), *Criminal Conversations: Victorian Crimes, Social Panic, and Moral Outrage* (The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2005), p. xxii.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.

<sup>69</sup> Wiener, 'Convicted Murderers and the Victorian Press', p.110.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>72</sup> R. Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth Century London* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

nineteenth century fascination with murderers and intricate details of their crimes was an interest shared by high and low.<sup>74</sup> Although Crone's focus is predominantly on broadsides she states that after the abolition of public executions, where broadsides relating to the hanging were typically sold, newspapers became more popular and modern crime reporting was developed as a form of entertainment.<sup>75</sup> Newspapers drew on the traditions of sensational fiction and broadsides, translating crime news into a category of popular leisure.<sup>76</sup>

Although not a prominent topic of discussion in his work, Adrian Bingham highlights that criminal behaviour received a great amount of attention in the press.<sup>77</sup> Court reporting remained central to popular journalism as it was a cheap, convenient and reliable means of providing human interest stories that entertained readers.<sup>78</sup> Contrary to Archer and Jones, among others, Bingham contends that it was the inter-war period which was particularly characterised by the development of human-interest features.<sup>79</sup> Editors and proprietors made their newspapers more accessible to their readers by making them a spectacular visual product, characterised by photographic spreads, illustrations, and bold, eye-catching headlines and fonts.<sup>80</sup> Sarah Newman and Matt Houlbrook argue that intense circulation wars between newspapers for readers and advertising revenue meant that crime remained newsworthy.<sup>81</sup> Violent crime sold well and attracted, as well as retained, newspaper readers.

Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg explore the ways in which crime has been presented in the media over a 200-year period.<sup>82</sup> The main focus of their

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>77</sup> Bingham, *Family Newspapers*, p. 126.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 126.

<sup>79</sup> S. Newman and M. Houlbrook, 'Introduction: The Press and Popular Culture in Interwar Europe', *Journalism Studies*, 14 (2013), p. 643.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 643.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 640.

<sup>82</sup> J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson, and S. Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2013).

study is an exploration of how and why different newspaper titles selected, constructed and presented a particular crime for popular consumption.<sup>83</sup> They look at which crimes tended to be reported on and when, and suggest reasons for this. The reality was that unlike sensational murders, everyday crime stories were rarely headline news but more often presented as gossip news, lacking in detail and substance.<sup>84</sup> Much like Wiener, they contend that the power of the media could be utilised to exploit the supportive interests of the public.<sup>85</sup>

John Carter Wood examines the portrayal in the national press of a woman accused of the murder of her husband in the late 1920s.<sup>86</sup> The case of Beatrice Pace attracted an unprecedented amount of press attention and became a touchstone for social commentary on marriage, domestic violence, and the state of British justice.<sup>87</sup> Carter Wood states that the press packaged the case for public consumption in a particular way but the story was not dictated to a passive readership.<sup>88</sup> Readers were offered what newspaper journalists and editors thought their readers wanted.<sup>89</sup> Inter-war newspapers treated crime as popular entertainment, depicting a society in the grip of violent crime of all kinds despite recorded instances of homicide cases remaining at historic lows from the turn of the century.<sup>90</sup> As Shani D'Cruze, Sandra Walklate, and Samantha Pegg contend it is difficult to predict which homicide will receive prominent coverage.<sup>91</sup> Certain cases may be held to be representative of wider social concerns and subject to gratuitous media reportage.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>86</sup> Carter Wood, "The Most Remarkable Woman in England".

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>91</sup> S. D'Cruze, S. Walklate, and S. Pegg, *Murder: Social and Historical Approaches to Understanding Murder and Murderers* (Willan Publishing: Devon, 2006), p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press*, p. 11.

## Early Twentieth-Century Fatherhood

In this section the historiography of fatherhood is considered, with a specific focus on the effects of unemployment on ideas of fatherhood. The inclusion of fathers in family history and recognition that they did more than provide financially for their families is a strong theme in much of the recent literature on late nineteenth and early twentieth century fatherhood.<sup>93</sup> Unemployment is examined in this section due to the central role allotted to providing in constructions of masculinity and fatherhood during the early twentieth century. Also discussed in this section are the ways in which the effects of unemployment on mental health were viewed in the early twentieth century.

The role of the father in the family unit, and the ideal functions he was to fulfil, has been explored extensively by Julie-Marie Strange and Laura King. Strange examines different experiences of working class fatherhood and domestic life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>94</sup> She argues that although definitions of fatherhood remained tied to breadwinning and patriarchal authority, from the late nineteenth century fathers were increasingly viewed as their children's playmates.<sup>95</sup> King, however, traces the change in the expectations of fatherhood to the mid-1930s, as seen through the greater involvement of men in childcare tasks and taking their relationships with their children seriously.<sup>96</sup> The bar for 'good' fatherhood was raised by the end of the interwar period and the provision of basics, such as food, clothing and accommodation, was no longer good enough: children also

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<sup>93</sup> See J. Strange, 'Fathers at Home: Life Writing and Late-Victorian and Edwardian Plebeian Domestic Masculinities', *Gender and History*, 22 (2015), pp. 703-717, L. King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015), J. Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2015), L. King, 'Hidden Fathers? The Significance of Fatherhood in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 26 (2012), pp. 25-46, J. Strange, 'Fatherhood, Providing, and Attachment in Late Victorian and Edwardian Working Class Families', *The Historical Journal*, 55 (2012), pp. 1007-1027, S. Olsen, 'The Authority of Motherhood in Question: Fatherhood and the Moral Education of Children in England, c.1870-1900', *Women's History Review*, 18 (2009), pp. 765-780, T. Broughton and H. Rogers (eds.), *Gender and Fatherhood in the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2007), and T. Fisher, 'Fatherhood and the British Fathercraft Movement, 1919-39', *Gender and History*, 17 (2005), pp. 441-462.

<sup>94</sup> See Strange, 'Fathers at Home', pp. 703-717 and Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>96</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 4.

needed to be developed mentally and emotionally.<sup>97</sup> Despite King and Strange's attempts to demonstrate the different roles a father fulfilled in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is clear that financial provision remained central to fatherhood and that fathers were judged according to whether they could fulfil this role.

Several historians have explored the detrimental effect of a father's unemployment on family relationships.<sup>98</sup> Julie-Marie Strange has linked patterns of male unemployment to an increase in domestic violence and family breakdown.<sup>99</sup> Masculine authority within the family rested on the fulfilment of provider obligations, thus, when provision faltered, the power dynamics of domestic life changed.<sup>100</sup> One way to reassert paternal and masculine power, Strange contends, was through physical and verbal abuse.<sup>101</sup> Ginger Frost has also looked at the breakdowns of families due to unemployment in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Frost examines cases of domestic violence in cohabitating couples in the nineteenth century and argues that because such couples were not legally married that it was more difficult for the man to claim to be head of the household.<sup>102</sup> Demonstrating physical strength was one of few ways that these men could impose themselves. However, by narrowing her analysis to cohabitating couples and domestic abuse she ignores conventional relationships in which arguments over money were also likely to have been frequent and brought about similar results.

Historians have underestimated the full extent of psychological damage wrought by unemployment, under-employment, and financial anxiety. Helen Jones argues that low living

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>98</sup> See Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, G. Frost, ' "He Could Not Hold His Passions": Domestic Violence and Cohabitation in England (1850-1905), *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés*, 12 (2008), pp. 45-63, and A. Clark, 'Domesticity and the Problem of Wifebeating in Nineteenth Century Britain: Working-Class Culture, Law and Politics', in S. D'Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950: Gender and Class* (Longman: London, 2000), pp. 27-40.

<sup>99</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 51.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>102</sup> Frost, 'He Could Not Hold His Passions', p. 48.



standards were not an inevitable consequence of unemployment.<sup>103</sup> She claims that many of those in unemployment were able to adapt to straitened financial and social circumstances. Ross McKibbin states that it cannot be convincingly argued that the unemployed in general disintegrated, that their mental faculties withered, or that there was some sort of progressive decline.<sup>104</sup> Economic conditions of the unemployed differed widely and the ability to cope with unemployment was in part dependent upon existing financial resources.<sup>105</sup> While Jon Lawrence reminds us that many British workers did well in the 1930s, benefitting from falling prices and cheap money, economic insecurity and joblessness were a brutal reality for millions of Briton's lives.<sup>106</sup> Although touched upon by John Tosh, he too underestimates the effects of unemployment, contending that great shame was the only negative impact for fathers who failed to provide for his family.<sup>107</sup> Whilst Laura King contends that the economic depressions of the 1920s and 1930s undermined the central duty of fatherhood and masculinity she does not investigate the consequences of unemployment on psychological, physical and family wellbeing.<sup>108</sup> Possibly because her focus is on drawing attention to the myriad of other roles fathers assumed in the twentieth century she did not want to focus solely on breadwinning and its often-damaging effects.

Although writing about the Victorian period, Akihito Suzuki finds that many working class men suffered from an intense fear of poverty and deep anxiety about their economic future.<sup>109</sup> Their anxiety was rooted in poverty, unsteady work, grief over economic losses

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<sup>103</sup> H. Jones, *Health and Society in Twentieth Century Britain* (Longman: London, 1994), p. 83.

<sup>104</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1994), p. 253.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>106</sup> J. Lawrence, 'Class, "Affluence", and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c.1930-64', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), p. 274.

<sup>107</sup> J. Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale University Press: 1999), p. 14.

<sup>108</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 25.

<sup>109</sup> A. Suzuki, 'Lunacy and Labouring Men: Narratives of Male Vulnerability in Mid-Victorian London', in R. Bivins and J. Pickstone (eds.), *Medicine, Madness and Social History: Essays in Honour of Roy Porter* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2007), p. 118. See also B. Kelly, 'Poverty, Crime, and Mental Illness: Female Psychiatric Committal in Ireland, 1910-1948', *Social History of Medicine*, 21 (2008), pp. 311-328 for the experiences of Irish women in the early twentieth century.

and unemployment, and psychological strains caused by stressful domestic situations.<sup>110</sup>

Julie-Marie Strange also discusses the effects of prolonged unemployment on mental health in her study of nineteenth and early twentieth century working class fatherhood.<sup>111</sup> She argues that some fathers were driven mad by financial uncertainty, their mental health escalating from depression to utter loss of reason. Often the negative effects of unemployment on mental health are viewed in relation to the economic depressions of the 1920s and 1930s but Strange and Suzuki highlight that this connection was made as early as 1860s.

Contrary to Jones and McKibbin, Selina Todd argues that the unemployed as a group were the most likely to live in poverty.<sup>112</sup> She also details further distresses and humiliations that accompanied unemployment and further undermined the unemployed, particularly those who were long-term unemployed, such as the household means test, relying on the financial support of family, meagre unemployment benefit, and a general feeling of hopelessness. Ian Gazeley also takes a negative view of the impact of unemployment on the mental health of the unemployed.<sup>113</sup> Gazeley states that the initial consequence of unemployment was likely to be an impairment of psychological health.<sup>114</sup> Drawing on a number of social investigations, such as The Pilgrim Trust's 1936 investigation 'Men Without Work', as well as reports by doctors and official surveys, Gazeley determines that unemployment negatively impacted mental health. According to Gazeley, however, these 'official' sources downplayed the extent to which the health of the unemployed gave any

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<sup>110</sup> Suzuki, 'Lunacy and Labouring Men', p. 121.

<sup>111</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 58.

<sup>112</sup> S. Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (John Murray: London, 2015), p. 68.

<sup>113</sup> See I. Gazeley and A. Newell, 'The End of Destitution: Evidence from Urban British Working Households 1904-37', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 64 (2012), pp. 80-102, I. Gazeley and A. Newell, 'Poverty in Edwardian Britain', *Economic History Review*, 64 (2011), pp. 52-71, I. Gazeley *et al.*, *Work and Pay in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007), and I. Gazeley, *Poverty in Britain, 1900-1965* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2003).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

cause for concern and failed to identify any serious health consequences of unemployment.<sup>115</sup>

Vicky Long analyses the effects of unemployment and poverty on mental health during the interwar period in her study of health care services for factory workers in the early-to-mid twentieth century.<sup>116</sup> Long argues that it was widely recognised by the government and employers that unemployment had a negative effect on health.<sup>117</sup> However, due to the financial restraints imposed by the 1929 economic Depression the state pushed responsibility for protection of workers' health into the hands of trade unions and employers. Long's study gives useful insights into how the government, employers, and trade unions conceptualised the relationship between unemployment and ill-health. However, because her focus is on factory workers, a large amount of the working population is absent from her analysis. Additionally, Long's study is more concerned with physical and mental health related to the repetitive nature of factory work and the amount of attention paid to unemployment is minimal, leaving this area ripe for more investigation.

The extent to which the effect of unemployment on mental health was recognised by medical experts on insanity as well as wider society prior to the economic depression of the interwar period has not received much attention in the historiography of mental illness. In the nineteenth century context, Catherine Cox observes that medical practitioners in Ireland acknowledged the disruptive impact that broader social and economic conditions had upon mental and emotional well being.<sup>118</sup> It was recognised that financial worries had a detrimental influence on the mind and medical officers attributed male anxieties in failing to fulfil their gendered economic roles as the cause of their insanity.<sup>119</sup> Akihito Suzuki also

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<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>116</sup> See V. Long, *The Rise and Fall of the Healthy Factory: The Politics of Industrial Health in Britain, 1914-1960* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2011), p. 89 and pp. 132-142.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>118</sup> C. Cox, *Negotiating Insanity: In the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012), p. 121.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 121.

examines the medical response to unemployment and financial difficulties but his and Cox's studies are few and far between and focus solely on the nineteenth century.

## Gender and Mental Illness

This section explores how historians have understood the interplay of gender and mental illness. The influence of gender on the identification and treatment of mental illness has attracted considerable historiographical attention. In her landmark study, *The Female Malady*, written in 1985 at the end of the second-wave feminism movement, Elaine Showalter argued that madness was feminised in the nineteenth century, and that women were the primary recipients of psychiatric treatment.<sup>120</sup> Showalter claimed that more women were diagnosed as insane than men, evidence of which she found reflected in asylum records and contemporary cultural understandings of mental illness, such as in novels, poems and artwork.<sup>121</sup> Her study prompted many historians to reassess the history of mental illness in relation to gender.

In agreement with Showalter, Joseph Melling explores the link between mental illness and gender. He states that clear gender differences can be detected in the way patients were certified in the nineteenth century as well as the factors attributed to the decline of their mental health.<sup>122</sup> Ezra Hasson, too, finds in his study of nineteenth century spousal certification of insanity that there was a sense of alignment between allegations of insanity and behaviour that deviated from social and cultural norms, such as notions of ideal womanhood.<sup>123</sup> Whilst gender was not the only factor in the diagnosis of those women as mentally ill, he finds that their departure from ideal female behaviour did constitute an

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<sup>120</sup> E. Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (Virago Press: New York, 1987), p. 3.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> J. Melling, '“Buried Alive By Her Friends”: Asylum Narratives and the English Governess, 1845-1914', in P. Dale and J. Melling, (eds.), *Mental Illness and Learning Disability since 1850: Finding a Place for Mental Disorder in the UK* (Routledge: New York, 2006), p. 73.

<sup>123</sup> E. Hasson, 'Capacity to Marry: Law, Medicine and Conceptions of Insanity', *Social History of Medicine*, 23 (2010), p. 11

integral aspect of their perceived abnormality.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, in cases of paternal child killing it would appear that while physical causes of mental breakdown among men, such as heredity, degeneration, depression, and head injuries, were also found in women, non-physical causes, such as army service and worries over financial provision, were specifically attributed to men because they fed into gendered expectations of fatherhood and masculinity.

There are some historians who argue that gender did not have much of an influence over the diagnosis of mental illness. Showalter's claim that women were more likely to experience breakdowns in their mental health than men has been critiqued by several historians, most notably Joan Busfield.<sup>125</sup> Busfield argues that madness took many forms and that to construct madness as a female malady is one-sided and undermines nineteenth century understandings of both women and mental illness.<sup>126</sup> Busfield contends that neither statistics on mental illness nor cultural representations provide evidence of any marked affinity between women and madness.<sup>127</sup> Whilst she commends Showalter's attempt to make women more visible, she states that it can be misleading to focus almost exclusively on women when attempting to understand and explain their situations.<sup>128</sup> David Wright finds that classic examples of 'gendered' diagnoses did not figure prominently at all in nineteenth century asylum records.<sup>129</sup> Standard psychiatric classifications were applied to both men and women using consistent criteria, although the number of particular diagnoses varied between the sexes.<sup>130</sup> Similarly, Jonathan Andrews and Anne Digby find that causes of

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> J. Busfield, 'The Female Malady? Men, Women and Madness in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Sociology*, 28 (1994), pp. 259-277.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>128</sup> J. Andrews and A. Digby, 'Introduction: Gender and Class in the Historiography of British and Irish Psychiatry', in J. Andrews and A. Digby (eds.), *Sex and Seclusion, Class and Custody: Perspectives on Gender and Class in the History of British and Irish Psychiatry* (Rodopi: New York, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>129</sup> D. Wright, 'Delusions of Gender? Lay Identification and Clinical Diagnosis of Insanity in Victorian England', in J. Andrews and A. Digby (eds.), *Sex and Seclusion, Class and Custody: Perspectives on Gender and Class in the History of British and Irish Psychiatry* (Rodopi: New York, 2004), p. 152.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

mental illness attributed to men and women showed strong similarities.<sup>131</sup> As argued above, whilst gendered differences can be found in the physical causes of mental illness, non-physical causes seemed to be determined by gender.

The interplay of gender and mental illness has also been examined in relation to the use and success of the insanity plea in criminal trials. Much like Martin Wiener, Jill Newton Ainsley argues that Victorian women charged with a serious violent crime were more likely than men to be acquitted on the grounds of insanity, even when men and women were charged with a similar crime.<sup>132</sup> Subjective notions of appropriate male and female behaviour dictated how jurors would respond to an insanity plea.<sup>133</sup> In the context of maternal infanticide, several historians have explored the extent to which the success of an insanity plea was gendered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Samantha Pegg states that given the strong social presumptions of the female as a nurturing caregiver the successful invocation of insanity in cases where mothers killed their children is unsurprising.<sup>134</sup> The insanity defence was not solely reserved for females but men did not elicit sympathy to the same extent as women.<sup>135</sup> Hilary Marland suggests that in the nineteenth century a diagnosis of puerperal insanity in women who killed their own children became almost synonymous with a successful insanity plea.<sup>136</sup> The term puerperal insanity was used to refer to a diverse range of mental illnesses associated with the rigours of

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<sup>131</sup> Andrews and Digby, 'Introduction', p. 24.

<sup>132</sup> J. Ainsley, ' "Some Mysterious Agency": Women, Violent Crime and the Insanity Acquittal in the Victorian Courtroom', *Canadian Journal of History*, 35 (2000), p. 39. See also P. Prior, *Madness and Murder: Gender, Crime and Mental Disorder in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2008) who contends that gender differences are reflected in criminal behaviour and in legal outcomes.

<sup>133</sup> Ainsley, 'Some Mysterious Agency', p. 40.

<sup>134</sup> S. Pegg, ' "Madness is a Woman": Constance Kent and Victorian Constructions of Female Insanity', *Liverpool Law Review*, 30 (2010), p. 215.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>136</sup> H. Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood: Insanity and Childbirth in Victorian Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2004), p. 178. See also H. Marland, 'Getting Away With Murder? Puerperal Insanity, Infanticide and the Defence Plea', in M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2000), pp. 168-192.

childbirth and the belief that women were the biologically weaker sex.<sup>137</sup> Diagnosing maternal child killers with puerperal insanity was one way to interpret their behaviour and provide reassurance that these women were not inherently evil but suffering from a mental illness.

Although Cathryn Wilson concedes that men who murdered their children could not cite the strains their reproductive cycles put on their bodies as women could, she contends that they relied heavily on the idealisation of prescribed gendered roles in order to be found guilty but insane.<sup>138</sup> Further, Daniel Grey claims that juries could be sympathetic to potentially insane men who had killed their children in a way that mimicked the treatment of women who utilised this defence.<sup>139</sup> Both Newton Ainsley and Pegg underestimate the extent to which male behaviour was strictly governed by notions of ideal masculinity and fatherhood. Not only did men have to provide for and protect their families, as argued by Julie-Marie Strange and Laura King, they had to nurture, care for, and entertain their children.<sup>140</sup> Failure to do so or deviation from this prescribed behaviour could be seen as evidence as insanity, much like for women who acted against their maternal roles.

The amount of attention given to women obscures the fact that men formed a considerable proportion of those classified as insane in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>141</sup> Conversely, Showalter's emphasis on women's overrepresentation in nineteenth century asylums has somewhat nudged men out of the picture. That is not to downplay the experiences of women but to suggest that men's experiences also need to be examined to fully understand reactions to mental illness. Less attention has been paid to the

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<sup>137</sup> Marland, *Dangerous Motherhood*, p. 3.

<sup>138</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 182.

<sup>139</sup> Grey, 'Discourse of Infanticide in England', p. 256.

<sup>140</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 82 and King, *Family Men*, p. 4.

<sup>141</sup> J. Oppenheim, *"Shattered Nerves": Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991), p. 15. Joan Busfield estimates that in the 1890s men represented 45 per cent of asylum admissions and women 55 per cent. She also notes that women tended to stay in asylums longer than men which partly explains their increased presence in asylums. See Busfield, 'The Female Malady?', p. 265.

extent to which understandings of mental illness were gendered in the twentieth century. This is partially due to access to sources (records produced after 1918 will largely be closed to public access) and possibly also reflects an assumption that gendered ways of thinking about mental illness persisted into the twentieth century.<sup>142</sup> Bonnie Evans and Edgar Jones claim that nineteenth century gendered approaches to insanity were still influential in Britain during the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>143</sup> When psychoanalytic therapies began to be used to treat patients, new forms of gendered divisions of madness were created.<sup>144</sup> Alison Haggett argues that relatively little attention has been paid to men's mental health outside of the context of the First World War.<sup>145</sup> However, in her effort to move attention away from soldiers, by starting her study in 1945 Haggett overlooks the experiences of ordinary men during wartime. Haggett also argues that men rarely sought help for psychological disorders because of the challenges it posed to their masculinity.<sup>146</sup> Further, when they did seek advice from a medical practitioner they often presented with somatic or psychosomatic symptoms. Therefore, it is highly likely that cases of depression and anxiety disorders have been consistently under-diagnosed.<sup>147</sup>

Asylum records for the nineteenth century are some of the most readily available source material available to historians who study mental illness.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, court records for the nineteenth century, where they exist, are also open to public access. However, this has led to an imbalance in the historiography and even though there is a growing body of work examining the twentieth century it is still largely reliant on asylum

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<sup>142</sup> See 'Introduction' footnote 3.

<sup>143</sup> B. Evans and E. Jones, 'Organ Extracts and the Development of Psychiatry: Hormonal Treatments at the Maudsley Hospital 1923-1938', *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences*, 48 (2012), p. 253.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

<sup>145</sup> A. Haggett, *A History of Male Psychological Disorders in Britain, 1945-1980* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2015), p. 3.

<sup>146</sup> A. Haggett, 'Masculinity and Mental Health: The Long View', *The Psychologist*, 27 (2014), p. 426.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 426.

<sup>148</sup> See Cox, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland*, J. Melling and B. Forsythe (eds.), *Insanity, Institutions, and Society, 1800-1914: A Social History of Madness in Comparative Perspective* (Routledge: London, 1999) and J. Melling and B. Forsythe, *The Politics of Madness: The State, Insanity and Society in England, 1845-1914* (Routledge: London, 2006).



records as they become open to the public.<sup>149</sup> This means that historians have for the most part focused on the experiences of asylum (or mental hospitals as they were legally termed after the 1930 Mental Treatment Act) patients and not the experiences of those who did not go to such facilities.

## **Mental Illness and Criminal Culpability**

A central research theme in this thesis is the way in which different actors understood mental illness in relation to criminal culpability and how their understandings were presented in the national press for a general readership. This section of the literature review examines the historiography relating to medical experts and understandings of mental illness. The main areas that are addressed are the way in which historians have studied trials in which an insanity plea was raised, the way historians have assessed the roles of different medical experts who testified on insanity, and the tensions between legal and medical understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability.

Several historians have drawn attention to disputes in the nineteenth century between legal professionals and medical experts over what constituted criminal responsibility and mental illness. Roger Smith argues that the M'Naughtan Rules, created in 1843 in an attempt to provide clear criteria on which to judge the criminal culpability of a defendant, actually provoked more debate over how to define criminal responsibility in the

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<sup>149</sup> See A. Brumby, 'From "Pauper Lunatics" to "Rate-Aided Patients": Removing the Stigma of Mental Health Care? 1888-1938' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Huddersfield, 2015), J. Walke, 'Repute and Remedy: Psychiatric Patients and Their Treatment at Bethlem Royal Hospital, 1930-1983' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2015), N. Baur, 'Family Influence and Psychiatric Care: Physical Treatments in Devon Mental Hospitals, c.1920 to the 1970s', *Endeavour*, 73 (2013), pp. 173-183, E. Jones *et. al.*, 'Psychiatric Case Notes: Symptoms of Mental Illness and Their Attribution at the Maudsley Hospital, 1924-35', *History of Psychiatry*, 23 (2012), pp. 156-168, B. Douglas, 'In The Shadows of the Asylum: Narratives of Change and Stagnation, c.1890-1930' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Exeter, 2008), and E. Jones and S. Rahman, 'Framing Mental Illness, 1923-1939: The Maudsley Hospital and Its Patients', *Social History of Medicine*, 21 (2008), pp. 107-125.

nineteenth century.<sup>150</sup> Smith also argues that many medical experts testifying on insanity saw the Rules as an attempt to question their expertise and professional status.<sup>151</sup> Tony Ward maintains that in the early Victorian period, legal and medical approaches to responsibility were so sharply opposed that it is reasonable to categorise them as two distinct discourses.<sup>152</sup> However, Ward contends that, by the late nineteenth century, there was a marked rapprochement between legal and medical views of insanity.<sup>153</sup> In a later article Tony Ward and Arlie Loughan suggest that claims to authority and expert knowledge by medical experts were in a state of perpetual negotiation and that there was a significant narrowing of the gap between legal and medical attitudes to insanity.<sup>154</sup> Janet Weston finds that medical evidence in the early twentieth century was shaped by legal requirements and that legal procedures adapted to accommodate medical theories.<sup>155</sup>

Martin Wiener, however, argues that it was disagreements between certain courtroom actors, such as judge and jurors, that fuelled significant changes in understandings of criminal responsibility in the nineteenth century, rather than contradictions between the views of medical experts and legal professionals.<sup>156</sup> In the mid-nineteenth century Wiener finds that jurors were less willing to condemn violent criminals

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<sup>150</sup> The insanity defence has medieval origins but its modern aspects date from the Criminal Lunatics Act 1800, which established a verdict of 'not guilty on the grounds of insanity', and the 1843 M'Naughtan Rules which laid down instructions for the judge to give to the jury in deciding a case of possible insanity. The M'Naughtan Rules stipulated that a defendant was not legally responsible for his crime if at the time he committed it he 'was labouring under such a defect of reason, from disease of mind, as not to know the nature and quality of the act he was doing, or if he did know it, that he did not know what he was doing what was wrong'.

<sup>151</sup> R. Smith, 'The Victorian Controversy About the Insanity Defence', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 81 (1988), p. 71 and R. Smith, *Trial By Medicine: Insanity and Responsibility in Victorian Trials* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1981), p. 16.

<sup>152</sup> T. Ward, 'Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in England, 1843-1939' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: De Montfort University Leicester, 1996), p. 43.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. i. See also T. Ward, 'Law, Common Sense and the Authority of Science: Expert Witnesses and Criminal Insanity in England, ca. 1840-1940', *Social and Legal Studies*, 6 (1997), pp. 343-362.

<sup>154</sup> A. Loughan and T. Ward, 'Emergent Authority and Expert Knowledge: Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in the UK', *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry*, 37 (2014), p. 29.

<sup>155</sup> J. Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System and Sexual Crimes in England, 1919-1960: Diagnosing Deviance* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2018), p. 82.

<sup>156</sup> M. Wiener, 'Judges v Jurors: Courtroom Tensions in Murder Trials and the Law of Criminal Responsibility in Nineteenth Century England', *Law and History Review*, 17 (1999), p. 468.

to harsh punishment.<sup>157</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, however, jurors were generally less tolerant of violent behaviour and stricter expectations of self-discipline made recourse to attributing violent crime to insanity socially and legally tolerable.<sup>158</sup> Additionally, pleas of provocation and drunkenness became less popular and less accepted so the insanity plea filled this gap.

Another area of debate in the historiography of criminal responsibility is the extent to which the M'Naughtan Rules were manipulated by both legal and medical professionals, depending on how insanity was understood. Nigel Walker contends that following their implementation in 1843 the M'Naughtan Rules were either widely stretched by judges or not mentioned at all.<sup>159</sup> Tony Ward, however, argues that this occurred much later and that it was only by the 1890s that interpretation of the M'Naughtan Rules was becoming more liberal.<sup>160</sup> In some cases judges seem to have disregarded the Rules or paid them the barest lip-service.<sup>161</sup> Medical witnesses became as adept as judges at stretching the M'Naughtan Rules as they grew accustomed to addressing them.<sup>162</sup> This is also commented upon by Roger Smith who states that the inconsistency of the M'Naughtan Rules meant that justice could be tailored to individual circumstances.<sup>163</sup> Joel Eigen, however, argues that the M'Naughtan Rules could be manipulated if medical experts and legal professionals were able to speak to the law's definition of insanity, 'the failure to know right from wrong'.<sup>164</sup> Some medical witnesses tried to dismiss the restrictions of the M'Naughtan Rules while

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 505.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 505.

<sup>159</sup> N. Walker, *Crime and Insanity in England: Volume One: The Historical Perspective* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1968), p. 110.

<sup>160</sup> Ward, 'Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in England', p. 70.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>163</sup> Smith, *Trial By Medicine*, p. 113.

<sup>164</sup> J. Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock: Defending the Diagnosis, 1760-1913* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2016), p. 1. Eigen has also looked at the periods 1760 to 1843 and 1843 to 1876 in two previous studies on the use of the insanity plea using cases from the Old Bailey. See J. Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity: Madness and Mad-Doctors in the English Court* (Yale University Press: London, 1995) and *Unconscious Crime: Mental Absence and Criminal Responsibility in Victorian London* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2003).

others incorporated that exact phrase into their testimony and by using that criterion as evidence of insanity.<sup>165</sup> Janet Weston's study explores how doctors, the judiciary and offenders made use of the flexible system of beliefs that emerged during the early-to-mid twentieth century to account for different forms of sexual misconduct.<sup>166</sup> Doctors did not adhere to any single theory of causation and carefully weighted different possible factors, from personal circumstances and age, to sexual history and personality, allowing their diagnoses to remain flexible.<sup>167</sup>

The historiography of the insanity plea has highlighted the increased receptiveness of the legal system to medical evidence regarding the sanity of defendants. Tony Ward argues that the growing receptiveness of the courts to expert evidence on mental illness can largely be attributed to a change in the expert's role within the adversarial system.<sup>168</sup> Defence counsels took the initiative in asking for this kind of evidence, which led to medical experts being labelled 'hired advocates' rather than impartial men of science.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, fears about the medical view of behaviour subverting the basis of social order had gradually faded from judicial consciousness by the opening decades of the twentieth century.<sup>170</sup> Martin Wiener attributes increased receptivity to pleas of insanity and the use of medical experts, even in cases of very unpopular defendants, to the accession of the Liberal Government in 1880.<sup>171</sup> The Home Office increasingly asked for evidence regarding a defendant's mental health from medical experts and, thus, sentencing power was in practice beginning to slip from the hands of judges into those of the medical profession.<sup>172</sup>

Historians have also examined the different types of medical experts involved in criminal trials in which the insanity plea was invoked. This has mainly focussed on the role of

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<sup>165</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 85.

<sup>166</sup> Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System and Sexual Crimes in England*.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>168</sup> Ward, 'Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in England', p.64.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>171</sup> Wiener, 'Judges v Jurors', p. 501.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 501.

prison medical officers in determining the mental states of defendants. The identity of other medical experts has, to an extent, been taken for granted, with historians assuming that they were asylum medical officers or private practitioners. Nigel Walker and Sarah McCabe brought attention to the role of the prison system and prison medical officers in diagnosing the mental states of defendants.<sup>173</sup> Stephen Watson argues that English prison medical officers regarded themselves as experts in diagnosing cases of ‘weakmindedness’ specifically, rather than mental illness more generally.<sup>174</sup> Watson contends that their knowledge of the mentally deficient criminal was a product of routine procedures for observing, classifying, and segregating prisoners that had existed from the mid-nineteenth century and became particularly prevalent in the 1920s.<sup>175</sup> Tony Ward suggests that at the end of the nineteenth century the prison medical service began to establish itself as one of the major agencies for investigating the mental conditions of criminals.<sup>176</sup> The impetus for this came from the magistracy, which was wary of adopting a medical view of crime.<sup>177</sup>

Joel Eigen dates the appearance of ‘less socially prominent and culturally anonymous’ medical officers employed in prisons and police stations to the Victorian period, somewhat downplaying the role they came to occupy in giving evidence on the mental states of defendants.<sup>178</sup> Catherine Cox and Hilary Marland also examine the ways in which prison doctors became experts in mental illness, although their main focus is on how prisons, particularly the separate system, caused mental illness.<sup>179</sup> Prison medical officers argued that they were uniquely placed to identify ‘real’ cases of insanity and differentiate

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<sup>173</sup> N. Walker and S. McCabe, *Crime and Insanity in England: Volume Two: New Solutions and New Problems* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 1973), p. 19.

<sup>174</sup> S. Watson, ‘Malingerers, The ‘Weakminded’ Criminal and the ‘Moral Imbecile’: How the English Prison Medical Officer Became an Expert in Mental Deficiency, 1880-1930’, in M. Clark and C. Crawford (eds.), *Legal Medicine in History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1994), p. 223.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>176</sup> Ward, ‘Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in England’, p. 57.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>178</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 5.

<sup>179</sup> C. Cox and H. Marland, ‘Broken Minds and Beaten Bodies: Cultures of Harm and The Management of Mental Illness in Mid-to-Late Nineteenth Century English and Irish Prisons’, *Social History of Medicine*, 31 (2018), pp. 688-710.

them from those feigning insanity.<sup>180</sup> Because they dealt with so many cases of mental illness, feigned and real, prison medical officers claimed they were developing a particular expertise in framing new categories of mental disorder in prisoners.<sup>181</sup>

Historians have also explored lay understandings of criminal responsibility and insanity, although not to the same extent as medical and legal conceptions. Roy Porter's call for medical history 'from below' highlighted the need for understanding how lay people labelled sickness in order to illuminate their assumptions about the cause, type, prognosis and remedy.<sup>182</sup> Tony Ward looks at the role of juries in translating the evidence given by medical experts.<sup>183</sup> He states that because inexperienced laypeople were the ultimate judges of insanity it was essential that they heard from a medical expert who was skilled and experienced in the examination of the insane.<sup>184</sup> He does not, however, examine the testimony of lay witnesses pertaining to mental illness. Joel Eigen and Janet Weston have commented on the way in which jury members reacted to the opinions of expert witnesses and the amount of importance they attached to their testimony.<sup>185</sup> However, neither author has investigated lay testimony itself and the role it had to play in trials in which the defendant's sanity was in question. This is a crucial oversight since lay understandings of mental illness guided jury members to their decisions.

## Conclusions to Chapter One

There are several areas of historical research that a study of representations of paternal child killers in the English press in the early twentieth century adds to and challenges: the

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>182</sup> R. Porter, 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History From Below', *Theory and Society*, 14 (1985), p. 187.

<sup>183</sup> Ward, 'Law, Common Sense and the Authority of Science', p. 343.

<sup>184</sup> T. Ward, 'Observers, Advisers, or Authorities? Experts, Jurists and Criminal Responsibility in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 12 (2001), p. 107.

<sup>185</sup> J. Eigen, 'Sense and Sensibility: Fateful Splitting in the Victorian Insanity Trial', in R. Meikan (ed.), *Domestic and International trials, 1700-2000: The Trial in History, Volume Two* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2003), p. 22 and Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System and Sexual Crimes*, p. 32.

historiography of paternal child killers; crime and punishment in the twentieth century; twentieth century fatherhood; gender and mental illness; and mental illness and criminal culpability. This thesis broadens the scope of the historiography of paternal child killing by examining cases committed after 1913 and up to the outbreak of the Second World War. Additionally, this thesis examines press depictions of these men and their mental health and asks whether these constructions changed over time in relation to wider social and economic changes. This has been anticipated, to an extent, by Cathryn Wilson, Jade Shepherd and Daniel Grey and, therefore, this thesis builds on the foundations laid by their studies. However, this thesis differs from their work by using one main primary source to consistently analyse how paternal child killing was presented to the general public over a 40-year period. By solely looking at newspaper representations of cases of paternal child killing a sense of how violent crimes were interpreted for public consumption and the importance ascribed to these kind of crimes during the early twentieth century is gained.

This thesis also challenges two pieces of existing literature on paternal child killing committed in the early twentieth century. The findings presented in this thesis challenge Alesha Lister's assertion that paternal child killing was mainly committed by working class men and, instead, highlights how this was an act carried out by men across the social spectrum. Further, newspaper editors and journalists did not present paternal child killing as a working class act and actually relished cases in which a middle class father was the perpetrator since this gave them more fodder for their readers. The second piece of literature this thesis challenges is Ginger Frost's study of illegitimacy, ex-soldiers, and paternal child murder in which she argues that the war service of fathers who killed their children diminished in importance in trials and in the newspaper coverage by 1923. The findings from my own sample indicate the opposite and it is argued that the army service of paternal child killers retained relevance for the narrative constructed by newspapers until the late 1930s.

This thesis contributes to the historiography of crime and punishment in the early twentieth century, an area that has not received much historical attention thus far. The research presented in thesis suggests that portrayals of violent crime became more sympathetic as recourse to traditional forms of punishment diminished. There was an attempt at understanding the human psyche to ascertain why previously loving fathers killed their children. Janet Weston has explored this in relation to sexual crimes and Weston dates this change in opinion regarding the purpose of punishment to 1919. This thesis contends that this change was apparent from the beginning of the twentieth century, if not from the late nineteenth century. As Martin Wiener argues, there was increased use of findings of insanity and reprieve of death sentences to penal servitude for life in lieu of a diminished charge or hangings. Violent punishment of violent crime was becoming less acceptable.

This study of paternal child killing challenges arguments put forward by Ginger Frost, Martin Wiener, and Barry Godfrey that it was only women who benefitted from gender stereotypes and that men were punished more severely than women for similar crimes. While this may hold true for certain crimes, such as petty theft or the murder of an adult, paternal child killers were not uniformly treated harshly in the courts. Much like women who killed their children, men were able to benefit from being fathers, especially if they had been loving and attentive prior to their crime. Judges, juries, the press, and the general public seemed unwilling to believe that a man would readily kill his children unless he was insane or there was some other mitigating factor that could be used to explain his actions.

Thirdly, the literature on twentieth century conceptions and lived experiences of fatherhood is enhanced by a study of paternal child killers. The analysis of the sample is used to determine whether mental illness experienced by paternal child killers was triggered by the expectations placed on 'ideal' fatherhood', such as the ability to provide financially, and the extent to which this was used to explain their crimes. Consequently, the role played by unemployment, under-employment or fear of financial decline is a central theme in this



thesis. Cathryn Wilson and Jade Shepherd have both explored the extent to which fathers internalised the role of provider and the damage this did to their mental health when they were unable to fulfil this role. This thesis suggests that it was men of all classes who were affected by this damaging expectation and that it was not just the fear of poverty but any change in economic circumstances that prompted concern for fathers who took their role as breadwinner sincerely. It is undeniable that there was a connection between the ability to provide financially and a breakdown in mental health. The research in this thesis indicates that this connection was recognised by the public and that anxiety over financial stability was seen as a legitimate reason for a breakdown in mental health. Julie-Marie Strange and Laura King have both shown that fathers were not just breadwinners in the family unit but carers and playmates for their children. However, it is clear that the most important role they had to fulfil, to them and the wider public, was that of financial provider.

The interplay between unemployment and heavily prescribed gender roles for fathers is further investigated using the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers. The negative implications of unemployment and financial difficulties for fatherhood and the ability to provide have been recognised in the historiography of paternal child killers, but only in detail up until 1913. This study, therefore, develops understandings of the effects of underemployment and unemployment on mental health in relation to the breadwinner model by examining how it was understood by medical experts and lay witnesses. This thesis contributes to the historiography of twentieth century fatherhood by examining how fathers' employment status was presented in the newspaper coverage using editorial devices, such as headlines, photographs, and the language used to discuss their job loss, and whether this changed during periods of economic depression. By doing so, the thesis extends the analysis from whether un- or under-employment played a role in cases of paternal child killing, to how this explanation was understood and interpreted by the newspapers.

This thesis complements existing studies on gender and mental illness and suggests that specific non-physical causes of mental breakdown were more readily associated with men and fathers specifically. These factors, including army service, unemployment, financial loss, anxiety over a child's health, and grief over the loss of a loved one, were acceptable in explaining breakdowns in mental health in paternal child killers. Men's behaviour, much like women's, was governed by social norms and for men these included stereotypes associated with masculinity and fatherhood. Because ideal fatherhood in the twentieth century encompassed financial provision, protection of children, and affectionate behaviour, fathers who were psychologically incapacitated by grief or unemployment sometimes felt it was their duty to end the suffering of their sick child. Consequently, these men were not condemned but viewed as reacting to the heavy expectations placed on their gender. It is argued in this thesis that fathers were just as likely as mothers to succumb to the gendered expectations placed upon them and were not always able to deal with what was asked of them.

This thesis adds to the literature on the interplay of gender and the use of the insanity plea in the early twentieth century by building on Cathryn Wilson's argument that paternal child killers regularly and successfully used the insanity plea due to specific constructions of fatherhood and masculinity. It is also demonstrated in this thesis that interpretations of what constituted 'insane' behaviour were broad and, therefore, many paternal child killers were able to benefit from the insanity plea. As Jill Newton Ainsley argues, notions of appropriate male and female behaviour governed the success of insanity pleas.<sup>186</sup> Fathers who killed their children out of protection, either from an illness, physical pain, or poverty, were enacting their ultimate fatherly duty and were, therefore, found insane.

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<sup>186</sup> Ainsley, "Some Mysterious Agency", p. 54.

Finally, this thesis contributes to the literature of mental illness and criminal culpability by exploring how paternal child killers whose sanity was in question at the time they killed their children was represented in newspapers to the reading public. Legal and medical documents are usually used to address the interplay of mental illness and criminal culpability. By looking at the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing it can be ascertained which understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were presented for public consumption in the early twentieth century. Although medical and legal documents allow access to the opinions of different actors, such as medical experts, legal professionals, and lay witnesses and how they understood mental illness, newspapers allow us to view how these opinions were presented for newspaper readers and which testimony was placed at a premium. The way in which journalists made use of the testimony of medical experts in the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing in which an insanity defence was raised has not been explored to any degree. An examination of their testimony as articulated by the press demonstrates several things; the extent to which medical testimony influenced the verdicts of judges and juries in trials of paternal child murderers; which models of insanity were most successful in these types of trials; and which type of witness testimony newspaper journalists relied on in their newspaper narratives.

This thesis builds on work by Janet Weston, Joel Eigen and Tony Ward analysing how mental illness was conceived of legally in the form of the M'Naughtan Rules and how medical experts navigated these legal conceptions. It is evident that even after the creation of the M'Naughtan Rules there was uncertainty as to how mental illness was to be defined. However, as Weston, Eigen and Ward have demonstrated the broadness and vagueness of the M'Naughtan Rules allowed these many different opinions on how to define criminal culpability to be incorporated. Additionally, it meant that many different violent crimes could be interpreted as acts of insanity. By the mid-twentieth century both medical and legal professionals were adept at manipulating the M'Naughtan Rules and the Rules were seen as

more of a guideline than a strict code. Using the newspaper coverage of cases in which the sanity of the paternal child killer was in question further underlines how broad definitions of mental illness were in relation to criminal culpability.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

This thesis analyses newspaper representations of a sample of 402 cases of paternal child killing, using a selection of digitised English national newspapers published between 1900 and 1939. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to examine the sample of paternal child killers and their representation in newspapers. This chapter explains how the sample was collated and how the newspaper coverage was analysed. It also discusses the choice of sources, and problems encountered along the way.

### **Choice of Sources**

A selection of seven English national newspapers, both daily and weekly, were chosen as the main primary source for this study. Newspapers provide an indication of the interests of the general public as well as topics newspaper editors and journalists believed the public were, and should be, concerned about. Paternal child killing, by its consistent inclusion in each of the seven newspapers throughout the period 1900 to 1939, is one such topic. The existing studies on paternal child killing which use newspaper articles analyse, in varying detail, a fairly broad time period, from 1800 to 1923.<sup>187</sup> The decision was taken, therefore, to focus on the period 1900 to 1939, the latter half of which has received no attention from previous

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<sup>187</sup> See D. Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales, 1870-1950', in H. Barron and C. Siebrecht (eds.), *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c.1870-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 73-92, M. Arnot, 'Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide in English Popular Visual Culture, 1800-1850', *Law, Crime and History*, 1 (2017) pp. 16-74, G. Frost, ' "Such a Poor Finish": Illegitimacy, Murder and War Veterans in England, 1918-1923', *Historical Reflections*, 42 (2016), pp. 91-111, J. Shepherd, ' "One of the Best Fathers Until He Went Out Of His Mind": Paternal Child-Murder, 1864-1900', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), pp. 17-35, C. Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad? Newspaper and Judicial Representations of Men Who Killed Children in Victorian England, 1860-1900' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Essex, 2012), D. Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Roehampton University, 2008), M. Gregory, ' "Most Revolting Murder By a Father": The Violent Rhetoric of Paternal Child-Murder in *The Times* (London), 1826-1849', in J. Thorn (ed.), *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender and Print, 1722-1859* (University of Delaware Press: Delaware, 2003), pp. 70-90, and J. Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Plesure: Discharging Child-Murderers from Broadmoor and Perth Criminal Lunatic Department, c.1860-1920', in M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002), pp. 216-248.

scholars. Examining the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing committed in the first four decades of the twentieth century allows both continuity with the existing studies to be considered and new findings to be ascertained.

Court records were unavailable after 1918 because of the 100-year rule which prohibits access to material of a sensitive nature. In addition to this imposition, the survival of legal sources, such as assize court records, depositions, coroners' reports, and police documents, vary according to location and the individual authority responsible for the records. Newspapers have been used in several studies of paternal child killing, both as the main primary source and to supplement a larger source set, providing additional contextual information.<sup>188</sup> With the exception of Melissa Gregory's work, which solely uses the newspaper coverage of *The Times* to investigate representations of paternal child killing during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the existing literature incorporates newspaper coverage alongside a range of other source material.<sup>189</sup>

This thesis, by contrast, offers a systematic exploration of the national newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing found using a number of keyword searches, and builds on the existing literature by using a wider selection of national newspapers to examine understandings of representations of paternal child killers. This approach allows for a greater understanding of how these cases were packaged for public consumption. Additionally, this study considers twentieth-century understandings of mental health and how this was thought about in relation to criminal culpability, as well as how this changed during the period under consideration. Newspapers are not a conventional source to examine the history of mental health but they are a useful source for exploring a multitude of understandings, attitudes, and opinions about criminal culpability and mental illness at

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<sup>188</sup> See Arnot, 'Perceptions of Parental Child Homicide in English Popular Visual Culture' pp. 16-74, Frost, 'Such a Poor Finish', p. 91-111, Shepherd, 'One of the Best Fathers Until He Went Out Of His Mind', pp. 17-35, Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England', and Gregory, 'Most Revolting Murder By a Father', pp. 70-90.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-90.

the time of publication.<sup>190</sup> Using newspapers to investigate understandings of mental health is a move away from 'official' sources typically used to explore the history of insanity, such as asylum records, court records, and medical writings.<sup>191</sup>

Of course, using newspaper articles as a primary source does have several drawbacks. The main hindrance of using newspaper articles is that only the information that journalists and editors chose to report can be accessed. Not all cases received the same amount of attention. Some cases can be traced from the initial report of the killing through to the outcome of the trial, and beyond, whereas in some cases only one article was found. This becomes less problematic in a study about representations of paternal child killing and understandings of mental health because it is the way in which the men were presented for public consumption that is of interest in this thesis rather than the statistics relating to paternal child killing. It is the discrepancies in reporting that prompt questions about why certain details were included and dwelt upon in some cases while in others these features fade into the background.

At the time of collating my sample, seven of the most popular daily and weekly newspapers had been digitised so it made sense to exploit this resource. Gale News Vault held *The Times* and *The Sunday Times*, ProQuest held the *Daily Mail*, the *Manchester Guardian*, and *The Observer*, and UK Press Online held the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express*. Local newspapers were not used because national newspapers provided a greater consistency in titles and issues. Whilst five of the seven newspapers were already in

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<sup>190</sup> Dean Rapp uses a selection of general interest, religious, and educational magazines to investigate the public's reception of Freud and psychoanalysis. See D. Rapp, 'The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920-1925', *Journal of the Behavioural Sciences*, 24 (1998), pp. 191-210 and D. Rapp, 'The Early Discovery of Freud by the British General Educated Public, 1912-1919', *The Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990), pp. 217-245.

<sup>191</sup> See, for example, A. McCarthy *et al.*, 'Lives in the Asylum Records, 1864 to 1910: Utilising Large Data Collection for Histories of Psychiatry and Mental Health', *Medical History*, 61 (2017), pp. 358-379, J. Shepherd, '"I am Not Very Well I Feel Nearly Mad When I Think of You": Male Jealousy, Murder and Broadmoor in Late-Victorian Britain', *Social History*, 30 (2016), pp. 277-298, and E. Hasson, 'Capacity to Marry: Law, Medicine and Conceptions of Insanity', *Social History of Medicine*, 23 (2010), pp.1-20.

publication by 1900, both the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* began publication after the century started, on 24 April 1900 and 2 November 1903 respectively. Although this causes an imbalance in newspaper coverage, this is only slight as these newspapers started publication very early on in the period and all seven titles were published continuously thereafter. The press referred to in this thesis is the English national press and does not include newspapers published in Wales, Scotland or Ireland.

### **Compiling the Sample**

The method used to compile the sample of cases was informed by the methodology used by Cathryn Wilson to create her database of cases.<sup>192</sup> Wilson carried out a keyword search of *The Times* online database, the Nineteenth Century British Library Newspapers collection, and Gales News Vault to create two separate Excel spreadsheets. The first contained a list of cases, details of the killings, and the source of information. The second database was a more in-depth version of the first and allowed for a more detailed analysis.<sup>193</sup> In order to collate my own sample, a series of keyword searches of Gale NewsVault, ProQuest and the UK Press Online's digitised collections of newspapers were conducted. A combination of terms was used to search for instances of paternal child killing using the words 'infant', 'child', 'children', 'family', 'boy', 'girl', 'son', 'daughter', 'father', 'murder' and 'manslaughter'. Some combinations brought up more results than others, for instance 'child, father, murder OR manslaughter' also included results for children killing their fathers, whilst others, such as 'children, father, manslaughter', 'infant, father, murder' and 'boy, father, manslaughter', brought up no results at all. Using this method 402 cases were found across the three digitised collections for the period 1900 to 1939. The keyword search brought up cases in

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<sup>192</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 92.

<sup>193</sup> In the second database Wilson included the date of the crime, geographical location, dissemination of the crime, profile of the victim(s), also killed the mother of the child, attempt on the life of the mother of the child, relationship to child, profile of offender of the adult male offender, man and woman both charged, method of killing, weapons used, outcome for male perpetrator, and other points of interest.



which the victims were older children, aged eighteen and above.<sup>194</sup> This does not invalidate the sample but highlights the fact that similar language was used to discuss cases in which the victim was an infant and an adult. Additionally, it moves the focus of the study away from cases of infanticide and the murder of young children as previously examined by Jade Shepherd, Cathryn Wilson, and Daniel Grey.<sup>195</sup> Once the sample had been assembled, a search was done on each of the digitised collection using the names of all the men in the sample. This was done in order to collect as many articles per case as possible. The newspaper articles were then printed and annotated to get a sense of what the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers looked like over the 40-year period and what kind of information was being reported.

There are some problems in using a keyword search for online newspapers: namely that they do not bring up everything specified in the searches. This could be due to spelling mistakes or differentiations in the spelling of words in the original newspaper. Some of the cases found using a keyword search were by chance as they were noticed them on the same page as another instance of the crime. The Old Bailey Sessions Papers online collection was only consulted once the sample had been compiled to determine how many cases of paternal child killing tried at the Old Bailey were picked up by the selection of newspapers. This in turn provided a clearer sense of how many cases made it to the national press. Out of the 48 cases of murder, manslaughter, and infanticide committed by fathers tried at the Old Bailey between 1900 and 1913 (the beginning of the period under investigation until the publication of the Old Bailey Sessions Papers ceased), only six were not found using the keyword search and, therefore, were not included in the sample.<sup>196</sup> That 87 per cent of cases

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<sup>194</sup> See 'Introduction' for a discussion of the use of the word 'child', p. 6.

<sup>195</sup> Shepherd, 'One of the Best Fathers Until He Went Out Of His Mind', pp. 17-35, Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', and Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England'.

<sup>196</sup> Alesha Lister also found few discrepancies between the data she collected from the Old Bailey Sessions Papers and the British Newspaper Archive. See A. Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London, 1889-1913' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Monash University, 2017), p. 20.

tried at the Old Bailey were reported on in the selection of national newspapers consulted suggests that my search method proved to be successful.

## **Analysing the Data**

The whole sample of 402 cases was split into four smaller sub-samples: 1900 to 1914, 1914 to 1918, 1919 to 1929, and 1930 to 1939. This made the analysis easier to facilitate as change over time could be assessed, both with existing studies and across the period 1900 to 1939 itself. The four sub-samples also allowed for changes in wider society and medical thinking to be explored, and for it to be determined whether these were reflected in the newspaper coverage. The analysis of the newspaper coverage of cases in each of the four sub-samples was divided into five sections: an overview of who the men in each sub-sample were, legal outcomes, the extent of newspaper coverage, editorial devices, and understandings of mental illness.

The first sub-sample consists of 223 cases and covers the period 1900 to 1914 since it closely aligns with the availability of the Old Bailey Sessions Papers. Because the First World War is often hailed as a harbinger of change the extent to which it affected the way in which the seventeen cases of paternal child killing was reported was assessed. Cases from the interwar period were then split into two sub-samples: 1919 to 1929 (a total of 87 cases) and 1930 to 1939 (a total of 75 cases). The interwar period was fairly turbulent, socially, economically, and politically, and it would have been remiss to examine those twenty years with the same lens. Although both periods witnessed economic depression, they were not of the same character and did not bring about the same long-lasting effects. In addition, the 1930s were ten years removed from the end of the First World War which could have affected the way in which army service was viewed as a mitigating factor. By splitting the sample into four sub-samples, the impact of socio-economic changes, such as the First World War, and the economic depressions of 1919 to 1921 and 1929 to 1933, on

representations of paternal child killers, attitudes to violent crime, and understandings of mental illness was analysed.

After identifying the sample and annotating the newspaper articles, three databases were constructed using both Microsoft Excel and SPSS. The first database was constructed using Microsoft Excel and was used to collect information about cases in the sample. Building on Cathryn Wilson's choice of database headings (see Footnote 193), categories of information that could be derived from the press reports which were interesting, frequently reported, or seemed of importance to the study were utilised as headings in the database (see Appendix 1). Although Wilson's headings were fairly comprehensive they did not allow every piece of information to be catalogued which is why 50 headings were used. Additionally, it was useful to have a central database that could be referred back to when necessary.

A second Excel database was used to collect information about the extent of newspaper coverage per case. The headings for this database included: the number of articles published per newspaper per case, the total number of articles per case, the total number of lines of text per case, the different types of article published on the case (editorial piece, news report, photograph, and reader letter), and the inclusion of pictures. This was done to assess trends in the total newspaper coverage of paternal child killers in the sample and was also analysed to determine how reporting of such cases changed over time.

Finally, four SPSS databases were created in order to run tests on the data and determine trends (see Appendix 2). A database was made for each separate sub-sample of cases which made it easier to assess trends in each time period. The data entered into the four SPSS databases was based on the information in the first Excel database. Using so many headings in the first Excel database made it easy to code the data, as many of the responses were simple yes or no answers. Not all of the Excel data was coded because some of the

answers were too complex and could not be simplified. For example, for the purpose of coding the data the occupations reported in the newspaper articles were condensed down into 105 different occupations, with some similar-sounding job titles being merged into one category, although the grouping of occupations could hide distinctions. Yet, using official classification systems, such as those employed by the General Register Office also has similar drawbacks. Edward Higgs highlights how, for example, labourers who failed to indicate their precise employment title could be subsumed under the more general heading of 'labourer'.<sup>197</sup> Additionally those who did not fit neatly into a certain category were classified with similar jobs under the General Register Office's schema.

Once the data had been coded and entered into the SPSS databases, tests were run on the data. The two functions used to run tests were frequencies and cross-tabs. The frequencies function was used to determine, for example, how many men were soldiers, were employed at the time they killed their child, lived in a particular type of accommodation, or received a certain punishment. The cross-tabs function, meanwhile, showed the relationship between a selection of variables: for example, the relationship between medical testimony on insanity and the outcome of the trial, the original charge in comparison with the verdict of the trial, or the punishment of ex-soldiers. A number of tables were then created to visualise the results of the SPSS tests.

### **Extent of Newspaper Coverage**

The extent of newspaper coverage per case and per newspaper title was analysed using the second Excel database and a number of tables which showed the number of articles per case, the lines of text per article, total number of lines of text per case, the number of cases reported on by each newspaper, number of articles published per newspaper, and the

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<sup>197</sup> E. Higgs, 'The Linguistic Construction of Social and Medical Categories in the Work of the English General Register Office, 1837-1950', in S. Szreter *et al.* (eds.), *Categories and Contexts: Anthropological and Historical Studies in Critical Demography* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004), p. 100.

number of articles per stage in the reporting process. By taking such a thorough approach to the frequency of newspaper reports published per case and per newspaper title, the way in which paternal child killing was packaged for public consumption by the selection of national newspapers used for this thesis was assessed. It was necessary to examine these features to determine whether newspaper reporting on paternal child killing changed over the period 1900 to 1939 and, if so, how. Jade Shepherd, Cathryn Wilson and Alesha Lister do not analyse the newspaper coverage per case or per newspaper so this part of the analysis represents a new way of analysing representations of paternal child killing.

### **Editorial Devices**

Five recurring editorial devices were identified across the newspaper coverage. They were then analysed to assess how these devices were used to report on paternal child killing. The five devices were headlines and sub-headlines, elements of the killing, sensationalism and public reaction, perpetual novelty, and pictures. Examining these editorial devices enhanced the analysis of the extent of newspaper coverage per case and per paper by looking at how the articles themselves were constructed. By examining these devices in four separate sub-sample over a 40-year period it could be determined whether use of these devices remained constant or changed over time.

As John Archer and Jo Jones, among others, have pointed out the headline is the tone setter of the article and alerts readers to the nature of what they are about to read.<sup>198</sup> It seemed worthwhile, therefore, to spend time unpacking the contents of the headlines using a three-part analysis. Firstly it was counted how many articles used a specific headline, sub-headline of specific headline, general headline, sub-headline of general sub-headline, sub-headline only, or no headline. Next, the nine most common features of the headlines

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<sup>198</sup> See J. Archer and J. Jones, 'Headlines from History: Violence in the Press, 1850-1914, in E. Stanko (ed.) *The Meanings of Violence* (Routledge: New York, 2003), p. 20, N. Goc, *Women, Infanticide and the Press, 1822-1922: News Narratives in England and Australia* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2013), p. 28, Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 122.

and sub-headlines were identified: location of the crime, occupation of the accused, crime committed, victim(s), relationship of accused to victim(s), punishment, insanity, means of killing, and description of the crime. This was done in order to examine whether there was any structure to the headlines, which aspects of the case were likely to make the headline, and how these changed over time. The decision was made to look at the same features for the newspaper coverage of cases in each sub-sample in order to assess accurately change over time. The final part of the analysis explored this further by examining the language used. The language analysis indicated whether there were certain words used with regularity in headlines and sub-headlines or whether they were tailored to individual circumstances.

A noticeable feature of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers during the period 1900 to 1939, which concurs with Wilson's findings, was the graphic accounts of wounds inflicted by the killers as well as detailed descriptions of the bodies of the victims.<sup>199</sup> This device, termed by Wilson as 'morbid tourism', was employed to attract readers. Sensitive details about the incidents became public knowledge that journalists and newspaper editors appeared to relish describing to their readers. These morbid descriptions centred on several aspects of the killing, namely the condition of the victim's body, the wounds inflicted on the victim, and the amount of blood shed. Inclusion of such details may have been due to, as Clive Emsley argues, the growth of what was permissible for the media to report, describe and show.<sup>200</sup> The violent content of newspaper articles in the Victorian period has also been commented upon by Rosalind Crone.<sup>201</sup> Not only did crime news sell but the general public seemingly revelled in the gory details. This editorial device is referred to as 'elements of the killing' in this thesis since there were nearly two decades in which the

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<sup>199</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 83, and J. Benson, 'Calculation, Celebrity and Scandal: The Provincial Press in Edwardian England', *Journalism Studies*, 10 (2009), pp. 840-841.

<sup>200</sup> C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England* (Pearson Education Limited: Harlow, 2011), p. 109.

<sup>201</sup> R. Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth Century London* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012).

descriptions were not graphic and the gory details almost disappeared from the newspaper coverage.

There were some cases in the sample which received a noticeable amount of newspaper coverage and could be termed 'sensational' cases. The term 'sensationalism' can also refer to the way in which newspapers discussed cases of paternal child killing. Just because a violent crime involved murder does not mean that it would attract sensational coverage, there were a number of variables involved. It is impossible to definitively determine what made newspaper editors single out some stories for extensive coverage while others of a similar ilk were largely ignored.<sup>202</sup> Moira Peelo argues that cases that became sensational contained elements that shocked more than usual.<sup>203</sup> Yvonne Jewkes claims that a crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence and children are associated with it.<sup>204</sup> This further complicates the questions of why some cases of paternal child killing became sensational and others received minimal attention as lethal violence against children featured in the majority of cases in the sample. Individual cases of paternal child killing of a sensational nature were analysed as to why it captivated public interest. This was done by examining the language used in the articles as well as considering contemporary concerns which may have been highlighted by the case.

John Carter Wood has explored newspaper sensation and crime, and his methodology informed my approach to cases of paternal child killing with a high volume of newspaper coverage. He used the case of Beatrice Pace, a woman accused of poisoning her husband in 1928 and explored how it became a touchstone for social commentary on marriage, domestic violence, poverty and the state of British justice.<sup>205</sup> Carter Wood looks at the rise of the case as a media event but also takes a closer look at its depiction in the press

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<sup>202</sup> Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England', p. 41.

<sup>203</sup> M. Peelo, 'Framing Homicide Narratives in Newspapers: Mediated Witness and the Construction of Virtual Victimhood', *Crime, Media, Culture*, 2 (2006), p.165.

<sup>204</sup> Y. Jewkes, *Media and Crime* (Sage Publications: London, 2004), p. 56.

<sup>205</sup> J. Carter Wood, *"The Most Remarkable Woman in England": Poison, Celebrity and the Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2012).

and contemporary relevance. The vast amount of newspaper articles, both local and national, published on the case enabled finer details of the case to emerge as well issues in the wider context to be examined. Combining this methodology for reading 'big' media cases with some specific text analysis, helped to examine newspaper representations across the period and to determine why some cases were more pertinent than others. This study thus provides a companion piece to his study of a woman involved in a sensational trial by examining instances in which men were at the centre of highly publicised trials.

Another identifiable editorial device in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers was 'perpetual novelty'. This idea is used to describe the tendency for newspapers to discuss cases of paternal child killing as if no such crime had ever been committed. Perpetual novelty took one of the following categorised forms: an overt statement that the case was one of an exceptional nature, a description of the event as a tragedy, or it was implicit by what was not said in the article. The analysis of the newspaper coverage which used perpetual novelty involved examining how journalists portrayed the event to their readers and whether the melodramatic style of nineteenth century reporting was still present in the early twentieth century. This gave an indication of the extent to which writing styles changed during the period 1900 to 1939. It also clearly demonstrates the very nature of news-reporting. Journalists presented these kinds of acts in such a way to encourage readers to read the article and come back to the newspaper for more information. This has not been commented upon by Cathryn Wilson or Daniel Grey in either of their work. It was surprising that, given the similarities between many of the instances of paternal child killing in the sub-sample, journalists and newspaper editors did not, or were unwilling to, comment on the fact that this was not such an unusual crime during this period.

The analysis of pictures in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers draws upon Claire Wardle's methodology used in her study on the visual press coverage of child



murders in the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>206</sup> Wardle broke down the type of individual subject into three categories; personal, institutional, and societal. For this study Wardle's method was adapted to incorporate any variances that arose. The type of image was noted as either a 'photograph' or a 'drawing'. The type of individual subject was broken down into three categories; personal, institutional, and environmental. In Wardle's methodology the third category she used in her individual subject analysis was societal which depicted how child murder affected and reflected local communities as well as wider society. This category did not fit with the printed pictures relating to the newspaper coverage of the sample. Personal images related to the offender(s) and the victim(s), institutional pictures showed the law at work, and environmental images depicted scenes related to the crime and those involved. In each category a number of sub-categories were included to aid analysis, plus an open-ended sub-category of 'other' for pictures which did not fit into these sub-categories. The placement of the images in the newspaper and in relation to the text of the associated article was also recorded. Finally, the number of images per newspaper title was noted. Taking such an in-depth approach meant that the use of images could be consistently tracked to determine whether there was a change over the period 1900 to 1939. Cathryn Wilson has also looked at pictures printed in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers. In the newspaper coverage of *The Illustrated Police News* she found 47 newspaper reports of child murder by men were accompanied with an illustration.<sup>207</sup> Wilson finds that illustrations were only used for the most sensational cases and argues that their inclusion was motivated by a desire to sell newspapers.

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<sup>206</sup> C. Wardle, 'Monster and Angels: Visual Press Coverage of Child Murders in the USA and UK, 1930-2000', *Journalism*, 8 (2007), pp. 263-284.

<sup>207</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 131.

## **Overview of the Sample**

The biographical details of paternal child killers and their victims were analysed to demonstrate the range of individual circumstances of the accused men in each sub-sample. The geographic spread and nationality of men in the sub-sample was examined, as was marital status, occupation, and type of housing in which the accused lived. The relationship the paternal child killer had with his wife or partner, and his behaviour after killing the child and in court were also considered. The number, age, and gender of the child victims, in addition to their legitimacy, were examined, and whether there were any other victims in the case.

Tables were made using data from the SPSS database for each sub-sample of cases and showed the location of cases of paternal child killing, the nationality of paternal child killers, the marital status of paternal child killers, the type of housing paternal child killers lived in, the number of child victims, the number of children in the family (including legitimate, illegitimate, and stepchildren) in comparison to the number of victims, age of child victims, and the legitimacy of child victims. Trends run on the SPSS data were also displayed as percentages where tables were unnecessary. The language used to describe the paternal child killers was also analysed. Finally, trends found in my data were contextualised and compared with findings from existing studies.

## **Examining the Legal Process**

Without access to assize and police records the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing can give an indication of general trends in charge, verdicts, and punishments. Only cases tried in England and Wales were analysed in this section as each country had a different legal system. A number of tables looking at charges, verdicts, punishments, and use of the insanity plea were made using the results of tests run on the SPSS data. Although the data relating to crime was not statistically relevant for the whole population due to the small

size of the sample, the data was compared with early-twentieth-century crime statistics to determine the extent to which punishments for paternal child murder fitted with punishments for murder more generally. This was achieved by compiling data taken from the Judicial Statistics for England and Wales on the number of murder charges and punishments for this crime per year for the period 1900 to 1938.<sup>208</sup>

### **Understandings of Mental Illness**

The final section of the analysis of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers explored understandings of mental illness. This was done by splitting mentions of mental illness into several different sections in order to access as many different understandings as possible: personal accounts, lay testimony, the testimony of medical experts, opinions of legal professionals, medical causes of mental illness, and non-medical causes of mental illness. One of the aims of this analysis was to investigate the extent to which approaches to and understandings of mental health differed between lay witnesses, medical experts and legal professionals. The analysis was also done in this way in order to determine how popular understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability, as well as those of legal and medical professionals, were presented for public consumption in national newspapers, and to show how mental illness was conceptualised during this time. The terminology, phrasing and descriptions used in the newspaper accounts were analysed to gain an understanding as to what constituted criminal culpability, and whether there were certain causes of mental illness which were likely to bring about a finding of guilty but insane.

For each case in which the mental health of the paternal child killers was raised in the newspaper coverage, a document was made detailing the name of the offender, date of the article, description of mental illness, medical testimony, and the result of the trial. For cases in which newspapers reported that a named medical expert had testified on the

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<sup>208</sup> There were no statistics recorded for the years 1915, 1916, 1933, and 1939.

mental health of the defendant, a separate document was created detailing the name of the defendant, date of the article, name of the expert, professional title of the expert, institution in which they worked, whether they testified for the defence or prosecution, reported contents of their testimony, and outcome of the trial. This was done in order to ascertain the frequency with which certain medical professionals testified, for whom, what their testimony consisted of, and how likely they were to find a defendant insane. It also allowed a quick overview of the type of language used to discuss medical understandings of mental illness at the time.

The language analysis helped to determine whether contemporary ways of thinking medically about mental health were mirrored in the newspaper coverage of legal, medical and lay evidence. In order to do this existing studies on early twentieth century mental health were consulted which are discussed in each analysis of the core chapters. For instance, it may be expected that Freudian theories of the role of the subconscious came to prominence in the early twentieth century and that there was an increase in war-related mental illness during and after the First World War since these were popular theories during this time. Likewise, it could be assumed that older theories of insanity became less popular over the period 1900 to 1939 as newer theories came to the fore.

Another way in which the content relating to mental illness and criminal culpability was analysed was by comparing the newspaper coverage of cases tried at the Old Bailey between 1900 and 1913 with the trial transcripts. This was done to determine how much medical testimony was being reported in the newspaper coverage and the extent to which journalists edited down their testimony. It also assisted in examining the extent to which newspaper journalists adapted the medical testimony given during a trial to make it more understandable, and the extent to which medical experts modified their evidence to fit legal

concepts of responsibility.<sup>209</sup> This helped to ascertain whether journalists were directly copying quotes from the trials or whether they interpreted the evidence themselves. The results of this comparison were then applied to the findings of the sub-samples for the periods 1914 to 1918, 1919 to 1929, and 1930 to 1939 as the Old Bailey transcripts ceased publication in 1913. Additionally I would have been unable to access trial records after 1918 due to the 100-year rule.<sup>210</sup>

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, newspaper articles provide an insight into understandings of mental illness in relation to criminal culpability but they need handling carefully. Journalists and editors had ultimate control over what makes it into final articles, meaning that not all details relating to the sanity of a paternal child killer invoked in the court were included. Court proceedings and the testimony of medical experts, which could be lengthy, are abridged accounts. However, the information that newspaper articles provide is revealing if this caveat is considered. The testimony given by medical experts that journalists chose to include in newspaper articles indicates a level of understanding among their readers. By assessing the type of terminology used and understandings proposed in the newspaper coverage across a 40-year period public interest in mental illness was determined.

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<sup>209</sup> The Old Bailey Sessions Papers did not record everything that was said during the trial and did not record questions asked of witnesses, so it is worthwhile to bear this in mind.

<sup>210</sup> See 'Introduction' Footnote 3.

## **Chapter Three: “A Father’s Madness”: Paternal Child Killing, January**

### **1900 to July 1914**

This chapter analyses a sub-sample of cases of paternal child killing for the period 1900 to the outbreak of the First World War in July 1914. This comprises 223 cases, over half of the total cases in the entire sample analysed in the thesis, and 349 child victims. This chapter argues that, although there were many similarities between cases of paternal child killing during this period, there was a great amount of variety in individual circumstances and reasons ascribed to explain each case, a finding also shared by Alesha Lister in her study of paternal child killers in the period 1889 to 1913.<sup>211</sup> Different actors involved in both the punishment of and reporting on paternal child killers had their own viewpoints on how a paternal child killer should be treated. Subsequently, there was no standard reaction to cases of paternal child killing. The personal circumstances of paternal child killers were highly influential as to how a case of paternal child killing would be treated in the national press. In turn, individual circumstances also affected how paternal child killers were punished. Paternal child killers were treated with more leniency than other type of male criminals who committed violent crime but this was not universal or guaranteed. Martin Wiener has also highlighted the fact that in each case of wife killing there was a combination of circumstances whose consideration exposed differences among and between judges, juries and the public and led to varying outcomes.<sup>212</sup>

This chapter builds on work done by Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson, both of whom look at nineteenth century paternal child killing through the lens of gender and expectations placed on the Victorian father. Specifically, they examine the pressures faced by Victorian fathers to provide for their families financially and they argue that the press

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<sup>211</sup> A. Lister, ‘Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London, 1889-1913’ (Unpublished PhD: Monash University, 2017), p. 7.

<sup>212</sup> M. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004), p. 213.

endorsed a specific paternal identity, with protection and provision, love and temperance at its core.<sup>213</sup> While their findings have been instructive for my own research, it is also evident that there was a greater variety in circumstances, explanations, and characterisations of paternal child killers in the early twentieth century.

This study complements work done by Laura King and Julie-Marie Strange who argue that fatherhood was much more varied than the 'breadwinner' model allows for.<sup>214</sup> The newspaper coverage of paternal child killers demonstrates that fathers displayed a range of behaviours prior to killing their children. They were not simply written off as brutal and uncaring. In many cases the killing of their child was represented as an act of ultimate fatherly love and sacrifice, a desperate act that they were driven to when all other avenues had been exhausted. Daniel Grey also looks at paternal behaviour and states that if fathers could give evidence of previous behaviour as a good father they would receive more lenient treatment.<sup>215</sup> Although Grey has done much to bring attention to paternal child killing in the Victorian period and early twentieth century, my research reveals that legal judgements and public reactions to paternal child killers were more varied than his analysis allows for. Personal circumstances, behaviour in court, likeability and appeal to the public, and their mental health, as well as fatherly behaviour prior to the crime, worked in a delicate balance and, therefore, it is difficult to determine who would receive lenient treatment, both legally and in the press.

Newspapers cannot give immediate access to the subjectivities of individual criminals or be used to assert that paternal child killers felt they had to adhere to certain

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<sup>213</sup> J. Shepherd, 'Victorian Madmen: Broadmoor, Masculinity and the Experiences of the Criminally Insane, 1863-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Queen Mary University London, 2013), p. 193 and C. Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?: Newspaper and Judicial Representations of Men Who Killed Children in Victorian England, 1860-1900', (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Essex, 2012), p. 112.

<sup>214</sup> J. Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2015) and L. King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015).

<sup>215</sup> D. Grey, Grey, D., 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State in England and Wales, 1870-1950', in H. Barron and C. Siebrecht (eds.), *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c.1870-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 73-92.

notions of masculinity. However, newspaper articles can be used to determine how journalists and, by extension, their readers believed a man should act as a father. Broad patterns in public attitudes to paternal child killing were evident in newspaper articles as newspapers were unlikely to support an opinion contrary to that of their readers. Further, using newspaper accounts of paternal child killing allows different viewpoints, such as those of lay witnesses, medical experts, and legal professionals, to be accessed. This chapter argues that the voices of lay witnesses were prioritised in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers. While the opinions of legal and medical professionals were evident in the newspaper coverage, it was the testimony of paternal child killers' family members, friends and colleagues on which the newspaper articles were constructed. John Carter Wood and Martin Wiener, among others, have examined how a specific crime was packaged for public consumption but there is more scope to explore how criminal responsibility and mental illness were reported to, and understood by, the public.<sup>216</sup>

The analysis is split into five sections focussing on different aspects of the material found in newspaper articles and examines what these details reveal about the way in which paternal child killers were conceptualised. The first section examines the biographical details of the paternal child killers and their victims. This is followed by an exploration of the

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<sup>216</sup> See D. Grey, ' "Agonised Weeping": Representing Femininity, Emotion and Infanticide in Edwardian Newspapers', *Media History*, 21 (2015), pp. 468-480 which examines newspaper representations of gender and crime, J. Carter Wood, *'The Most Remarkable Woman in England': Poison, Celebrity and the Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012) which uses one case to explore attitudes towards marriage, domestic violence, and the criminal justice system as well as the sensational newspaper coverage the case received, S. Pegg, ' "Madness is a Woman": Constance Kent and Victorian Constructions of Female Insanity', *Liverpool Law Review*, 30 (2009), pp. 207-223 which examines press representations and social conceptions of female insanity in cases of female child killing, chapter one of D. Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922' (Unpublished PhD: Roehampton University, 2008) which explores newspaper reporting of men and women's trials for child murder, M. Wiener, 'Convicted Murderers and the Victorian Press: Condemnation vs. Sympathy', *Crimes and Misdemeanours: Deviance and the Law in Historical Perspective*, 1 (2007), pp. 110-125 for a discussion of the role of the press in the public discourse of criminal justice, and M. Gregory, ' "Most Revolting Murder by a Father": The Violent Rhetoric of Paternal Child-Murder in *The Times* (London), 1826-1849', in J. Thorn (ed.), *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender, and Print, 1722-1859* (University of Delaware Press: Newark, 2003), pp. 70-90 which considers the effects of newspaper representations on the outcomes of the trials of paternal child murderers in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.



charges, convictions and punishments of paternal child killers. Section three explores the extent of newspaper reporting on individual cases. In section four the editorial devices employed by newspapers are examined. Finally, the way in which understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were portrayed in the newspaper coverage is considered.

## **1. Overview of the Sub-Sample**

In this section the biographical details of paternal child killers and their victims are analysed to demonstrate the range of individual circumstances of the alleged perpetrators in the sub-sample. The geographic spread and nationality of men in the sub-sample is examined, as well as marital status, occupation, and type of housing in which the accused paternal child killer lived. The relationship the paternal child killer had with his wife and partner, and his behaviour after killing the child and in court are also considered. The number, age, and gender of the child victims, in addition to their legitimacy, are examined, and whether there were any other victims in the case.

### *Geographical Spread and Nationality of Paternal Child Killers*

The cases in this sub-sample were from a wide geographical spread and were not solely confined to England despite the cases being drawn from English national newspapers (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2). The majority of cases (around 82 per cent) were committed in England and Wales; 182 and seven respectively. Out of the 182 cases committed in England 36 per cent occurred in London, reflecting the visibility of cases in the capital city and the access the primarily London-based national newspapers had to such cases from trials taking place at the Old Bailey. Most cases of paternal child killing in this sub-sample which were committed in England and Wales were carried out by English and Welsh men. It was not a crime that was explained away by attributing it to foreigners.

Country	Number of Cases
England	182
Wales	7
Scotland	5
Ireland	10
America	2
South Africa	2
Russia	1
Austria	3
France	3
Germany	5
Isle of Wight	2
Italy	1
Total	223

*Table 1.1: The location of incidences of paternal child killing, January 1900-July 1914*

Nationality	Number of Cases
English	175
Irish	11
Scottish	5
American	3
German-Austrian Pole	1
Russian	1
Spanish	1
Swiss	1
Hungarian	1
German	7
Born in India	1
Welsh	7
French	3
Italian	1
Austrian	3
South African	1
Czech	1
Total	223

*Table 1.2: Nationality of paternal child killers, January 1900-July 1914*

### *Marital Status of Paternal Child Killers*

Although the men in the sub-sample were in a range of relationship statuses, during the period 1900 to 1914 paternal child killing was largely the act of a married man (see Table 1.3). Jonathan Andrews also found this to be the case in his study of child-murderers sent to Broadmoor in the period 1860 to 1920.<sup>217</sup> This contrasts with the stereotypical image of the

<sup>217</sup> J. Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure: Discharging Child-Murderers from Broadmoor and Perth Criminal Lunatic Department, c. 1860-1920', in M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide:*

infanticidal mother who was a young single woman who could not afford to look after her child and bear the shame of having a child out of wedlock.<sup>218</sup> That more than half of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample were married indicates that different pressures motivated instances of maternal and paternal child killing. These pressures are discussed in more detail throughout this chapter.

Marital Status	Number of Cases
Married	118
Widowed	2
Separated	5
Not married to mother of the child	8
Lived with mother of the child	7
Lived with another woman	3
Had two wives	1
Single	3
Unidentified	76
Total	223

Table 1.3: The marital status of men in the sub-sample, January 1900-July 1914

#### *Employment Status and Occupation of Paternal Child Killers*

The men in this sub-sample had a wide range of occupations and the majority of the men were reported to have some form of manual occupation, such as a labourer, builder, printer, miner, and were more readily identifiable as working class.<sup>219</sup> However, there were a number of cases in which the individual had a middle or lower-middle class job, such as a clerk, chemist, or architect. There were also a small number of cases in which it was reported that the accused had an upper-middle class occupation or were reported as being a man of independent means. This variety of occupations calls into question Alesha Lister and Melissa Gregory's contention that paternal child killing was the behaviour of working class

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*Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002), p. 223.

<sup>218</sup> See C. Rattigan, *"What Else Could I Do?" Single Mothers and Infanticide, Ireland 1900-1950* (Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2012), D. Grey, ' "The Agony of Despair": Pain and the Cultural Script of Infanticide in England and Wales, 1860-1960', in R. Boddice (ed.), *Pain and Emotion in Modern History* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2014), pp. 204-219, and M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002).

<sup>219</sup> By only focussing on the occupation of men in the sample the work done by women and children is necessarily excluded. On occasion reference was made to the employment of wives or partners but not frequently enough that it stood out as a recordable piece of information.

men or that newspapers tended to report on cases of working class paternal child killing.<sup>220</sup> Cases of paternal child killing in which the accused was middle class were of value to journalists since they were cases in which a man had fallen from a position of privilege and committed a criminal act. Charles Tootell murdered his wife and two daughters before committing suicide. The newspaper coverage made much of the fact that Tootell was a partner in an auctioneer firm, a surveyor to the Maidstone Trustees of the Poor, and had long been connected with the Maidstone Volunteer Companies of the Royal West Kent Regiment.<sup>221</sup> Vic Gatrell has argued that working class people who committed a crime were more likely to attract the attention of the police as anxieties about social change, which had nothing to do with crime itself, were projected on to working class people who committed crime.<sup>222</sup> Cases in this sub-sample demonstrate that middle class men who killed their children faced greater scrutiny in the newspapers because of their background.

#### *Type of Housing Paternal Child Killers Lived in*

In 30 of the cases (14 per cent) the type of housing the paternal child killer lived in at the time of the alleged crime was reported in the newspaper coverage (see Table 1.4). Reference in newspapers to the type of lodging highlighted another aspect of the case, such as the social class of the father. For example, if the accused was said to have been 'feckless', a description of his home, usually dirty and in disarray with little furniture, was provided to support this negative depiction. Consequently, the reader was not surprised that such a crime could be committed under squalid conditions. This was particularly deployed in cases of neglect or starvation in which the NSPCC had been involved and provided testimony at

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<sup>220</sup> Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London', p. 26 and Gregory, 'Most Revolting Murder by a Father', p. 73.

<sup>221</sup> 'Terrible Domestic Tragedy', *Manchester Guardian* (25 February 1904), p. 12.

<sup>222</sup> V. Gatrell, 'Crime, Authority and the Policeman-State', in F. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain 1750-1950: Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990), p. 251.

the trial.<sup>223</sup> Monica Flegel states that NSPCC casework only described home life in ways that materially supported accusations of neglect and abuse.<sup>224</sup> More often than not families had been reduced to these circumstances due to forces beyond their control rather than an active choice.

The description of the killer's lodgings or area in which they lived also demonstrated the class of the accused, although this was only emphasised in ten cases. When reporting on the case of Clarence Marshall *The Times* stated that the street on which he lived was 'inhabited by working-class people'.<sup>225</sup> The crime committed by Charles Fox was reported to have occurred in 'one of the poorest and most squalid districts' of Fulham.<sup>226</sup> *The Sunday Times* also reported on Henry Higginbottom whose crimes occurred in a 'working-class neighbourhood'.<sup>227</sup> In contrast David Taylor, the manager of an electrical goods company, lived in a 'pleasantly situated street' in 'a residential district'.<sup>228</sup> If a middle or upper class man killed his child newspaper articles highlighted his large freestanding house in its own grounds to illustrate how scandalous it was that such a crime was committed in this setting. However, newspapers were not wholly keen to denigrate certain classes over others as can be seen in the case of Robert Towers who lived in 'one of the better working-class neighbourhoods'.<sup>229</sup> This indicates that some instances of paternal child killing were almost expected whilst others, committed by men seen to be more respectable, were surprising, reinforcing class ideology of this period regarding respectability.

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<sup>223</sup> The Society was founded in 1884 in London under the title the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It was renamed the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1889.

<sup>224</sup> M. Flegel, *Conceptualising Cruelty to Children in Nineteenth Century England: Literature, Representation and the NSPCC* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Aldershot, 2009), p. 36.

<sup>225</sup> 'Double Murder and Suicide', *The Times* (28 September 1903), p. 8.

<sup>226</sup> 'Child Murder', *The Sunday Times* (26 April 1908), p. 11.

<sup>227</sup> 'North London Tragedy', *The Sunday Times* (24 April 1910), p. 9.

<sup>228</sup> 'Murder of a Family', *Daily Mail* (19 April 1905), p. 3 and 'A Dreadful Occurrence' *Manchester Guardian* (19 April 1905), p. 12.

<sup>229</sup> 'Tragedy at Preston', *Manchester Guardian* (14 January 1905), p. 9.

The stratification of the working class into ‘respectable poor’ and ‘the poor’ has been discussed by Louise Jackson in her study of child sexual abuse. The ‘normal’ father who protected and provided for his family remained beyond reproach since the ‘respectability’ of adult male defendants was based on hard work and family duties.<sup>230</sup> Jackson argues that fatherhood and permanent jobs were signifiers of social status which carried great weight in the courtroom.<sup>231</sup> This same logic is evident in the newspaper coverage of working class paternal child killers deemed ‘respectable’ and those who were ‘poor’, i.e. unemployed and living in deprived conditions. For men who were in work or actively seeking employment they were portrayed as respectable while those who seemingly shirked their paternal responsibilities were viewed with disdain.

Type of Lodging	Number of Cases
Lodging house	3
Unspecified number of rooms in a house	3
Cottage	3
Tenement building	2
Small house	3
Cowhouse	1
Farm	2
Villa	2
Flat	1
Bungalow	1
House in own grounds	2
Owned unspecified property	1
Maisonette	1
1 room in a house	2
2 rooms in a house	1
3 rooms in a house	1
No home	1
Unidentified	193
Total	223

Table 1.4: Lodging of paternal child killers, January 1900-July 1914

<sup>230</sup> L. Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2000), p. 108.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

### *Relationship of Paternal Child Killer with Partner and Children*

In 73 of the cases (32 per cent) the newspaper articles reported that the father exhibited affection towards his children prior to the crime. Indeed, there were several instances in which paternal child killers acted like the ideal father up until the moment they killed their children. This supports Laura King's contention that although physical intimacy and expressions of love were limited, affection and fondness were often important dimensions within father-child relationships.<sup>232</sup> Countering this image of the loving father was that of the abusive father. In eighteen cases (8.5 per cent) the newspaper articles implied that the father was unaffectionate towards his children. Many fathers were also reported to have routinely physically abused their children through violent behaviour. As John Tosh argues, the right and acceptability of a father to physically chastise his children was called into question towards the end of the nineteenth century and the inclusion of such a detail in the newspaper coverage signalled to the reader that this was not the usual amount of punishment to inflict on a child.<sup>233</sup> Further, Julie-Marie Strange states that men traditionally had a duty to discipline their children but there were problems negotiating chastisement as a marker of paternal obligation and the use of unnecessary violence to punish children.<sup>234</sup>

Relying on the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers to provide evidence of fatherly behaviour in the early twentieth century can be problematic. This was evident in the case of William Burley who was found guilty of the manslaughter of his step-daughter.

Burley's case was tried at the Old Bailey which allows for comparison of the national newspaper coverage with the trial transcript. At his trial medical evidence was given about the horrific wounds Burley inflicted on the child, some of which were of a sexual nature.<sup>235</sup>

The medical expert detailed bruising and lacerations to the child's genitals caused by a piece

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<sup>232</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 89.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>234</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 20.

<sup>235</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 14 June 2018), April 1902, trial of William George Burley (t19020407-316).

of iron piping, which had also been used to beat the child. The newspaper coverage, however, made no mention of the wounds on her genitals, only noting that Burley had beaten the child with a piece of iron piping and that she had died from her injuries. Articles in both *The Times* and the *Daily Express* stated that Burley had been 'very fond of the child' and focussed on the evidence given about the defendant's 'muddled, confused state'.<sup>236</sup> The *Daily Express* called it a 'Sad Murder Charge', emphasised that Burley, a dock labourer, was unable to pay his rent due to 'little work and less pay', and reported that the judge took a very sympathetic view of his financial position.<sup>237</sup>

The omission of Burley's brutal attack on the child in the newspaper coverage and the portrayal of him as loving and affectionate is revealing. In the early twentieth century, the NSPCC was active in bringing to light cruelty to children by their parents as childhood became conceptualised as a protected, carefree time to be enjoyed by all children.<sup>238</sup> However, there was no legal framework with which to deal with child sexual abuse and it was tried variously as 'unlawful carnal knowledge' or 'indecent assault'.<sup>239</sup> Louise Jackson states that in the late Victorian period euphemisms, such as 'moral outrage', 'corruption', and 'immorality', were widely used in the newspaper coverage, reports and campaigns relating to child sexual abuse.<sup>240</sup> Because of this there was not the language with which to discuss this case. It may have been easier to interpret it as an act of insanity, even though this line of defence proved unsuccessful, than to delve into the intricacies of child sexual abuse. This case further highlights the varied and unpredictable nature of the newspaper reporting on paternal child killing as it has many features of a case which received negative treatment in the press. For instance, the man was the step-father of the child, he killed her

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<sup>236</sup> 'Central Criminal Court', *The Times* (10 April 1902), p. 15 and 'Sad Murder Charge', *Daily Express* (10 April 1902), p. 7.

<sup>237</sup> 'Sad Murder Charge', *Daily Express* (10 April 1902), p. 7.

<sup>238</sup> Flegel, *Conceptualising Cruelty to Children*, p. 1 and H. Cunningham, *The Invention of Childhood* (BBC Books: London, 2006), p. 140.

<sup>239</sup> L. Jackson, 'The Child's Word in Court: Cases of Sexual Abuse in London, 1870-1914', in M. Arnot and C. Osborne (eds.), *Gender and Crime in Modern Europe* (UCL Press: London, 1999), p. 223.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.



in a violent and brutal way, and he sexually abused her. Instead, the reader is made to feel sorry for Burley because of his supposed love for the child and his inability to financially support his family. His violent treatment of the child was not enough to counter the image of a financially struggling father.

In 30 of the cases (13 per cent) it was stated that the accused man and his wife or partner had a good relationship. This included reference to living happily together, the man being called an affectionate husband, never quarrelling with his partner, and being devoted to her. In 26 of the cases (11 per cent), however, the newspaper articles reported that the accused man and his wife or partner had a bad relationship. This included quarrelling or arguing, the man's cruelty towards his wife or partner, fits of jealousy about his wife's behaviour, and his wife expressing fear about her husband's violence. As with many of the other biographical details included in an article, the nature of the relationship the offender had with his wife or partner highlighted the range of personal circumstances reported in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases. The portrayal of fathers and husbands as either kind or unaffectionate prior to killing their children created a certain image of the man in question and influenced how the case was read. In learning that a father was caring and affectionate to his family prior to their murder, the reader was likely to be shocked by the turn of events and felt more sympathy for a man who had seemingly been a 'good' father. Conversely, in a case in which the father had been violent to and detached from his family, the crime was less shocking and almost predictable.

#### *Displays of Emotion by Paternal Child Killers*

In nineteen cases (9 per cent) it was stated that the defendant displayed some form of emotion either on his arrest or during his trial. Displays of emotion varied, the most common being crying on arrest, on hearing testimony from witnesses during the trial, or when being sentenced. Daniel Grey contends that in order for men accused of killing their

children to receive sympathy from newspapers their distress and remorse had to be a low-key yet convincingly sincere display of sadness or fear in order to demonstrate the masculine virtue of self-control.<sup>241</sup> Yet, the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample shows otherwise. Descriptions of tears and physical collapse were regular features of newspaper reporting on men who killed their children showing that it was not just women who exhibited their grief openly. These descriptions of emotional fathers reveal the remorse felt by some men for killing their children, thus, making them more sympathetic figures. In contrast with this image are the eighteen cases (8 per cent) in which it was reported that the accused did not display any emotion either on arrest or during his trial. Mention of this kind of composed behaviour suggests that the journalist wanted the reader to be aware of the father's cold-heartedness and lack of remorse. Inclusion of over-emotional and under-emotional behaviour indicated that these men were acting contrary to acceptable notions of masculinity.

#### *Number, Gender, and Age of Child Victims*

In 70 per cent of cases in this sub-sample there was only one victim indicating that fathers did not tend to murder all of their children (see Table 1.5). However, the newspapers articles did not always provide information on the total number of children in every family of the accused so this statement can only be tentatively asserted. There were 114 cases (50 per cent) for which information was provided on the total number of children in the family of the accused and the number of fatalities (see Table 1.6). From the information provided by the newspapers, the number of female child victims (80) was slightly higher than the number of male victims (70).

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<sup>241</sup> Grey, 'Agonised Weeping', p. 471.

Number of Child Victims	Number of Cases
1	158
2	38
3	17
4	6
5	1
6	2
17	1
Total	223

Table 1.5: The number of child victims per case, January 1900-July 1914

	Number of Child Victims Referred to in Newspaper Reports					
Number of Children in Family	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	11	0	1	0	0	0
2	10	13	0	0	0	0
3	11	8	9	1	0	0
4	3	1	1	4	0	0
5	4	0	4	0	0	0
6	5	1	0	1	1	2
7	1	0	0	0	0	0
9	2	1	0	0	0	0
11	1	0	0	0	0	0

Table 1.6: The number of children in the family (including legitimate, illegitimate, and stepchildren) in comparison to the number of victims, January 1900-July 1914

The age of child victims in the sub-sample ranged from newborn to 29 years. In 12 per cent of cases the victim's age was not given, instead the child was simply stated to be 'very young', 'a baby', 'an infant', 'little', or 'the youngest child'. In this sub-sample the children who were most likely to be killed were those aged between one year old and ten years old (see Table 1.7), with 48 per cent of child victims falling in this age bracket. Jonathan Andrews found in his study of parental child killers committed to Broadmoor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that 43 per cent of the victims in his sample were aged between two and fifteen years.<sup>242</sup> He also observed that typically the murdered children in his sample were the youngest in large families and suggested that child murder was, in part,

<sup>242</sup> Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure', p. 220.

a response to socio-economic pressures of caring for a large family.<sup>243</sup> This is an explanation which cannot be tested for this sub-sample since there is not enough information provided on family size in the newspaper coverage. In addition to the child victims detailed above there were a number of other victims killed or threatened, including other children of the accused or in the extended family, the wife, partner or mother of the child, the mother-in-law, a neighbour, and a lodger. In nearly 20 per cent of the cases the accused also killed his wife, partner or mother of the child and in a further 3 per cent an attempt was made on their lives.

Age	Number
Under 1 year old	38
1 to 10 years old	169
11 to 18 years old	22
Over 18 years	4
Description	28
Unidentified	90

Table 1.7: The age of child victims, January 1900-July 1914

#### *Legitimacy of the Child Victim(s)*

In this sub-sample legitimate children were most likely to be killed by their fathers (see Table 1.8), which contrasts with the typical victim of women who committed similar crimes, an illegitimate newborn.<sup>244</sup> This also supports Cathryn Wilson's study of late nineteenth century paternal child killing in which she finds that 70 per cent of the child victims in her sample were murdered by their legitimate fathers.<sup>245</sup> Fathers were more likely to kill their legitimate children because they wanted to protect them. In this sub-sample of cases, paternal protection took the form of child murder when the father had failed in his obligation to provide financially or to ensure the health of his children. Samuel Dye murdered his daughter before committing suicide. Dye was paralysed in both legs and confined to his bed and according to *The Sunday Times* Dye's 'incapacity for work' was the cause of his drastic

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>244</sup> See Rattigan, *What Else Could I Do?*, Grey, 'The Agony of Despair', pp. 204-219, and Jackson, *Infanticide*.

<sup>245</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 21.

course of action.<sup>246</sup> One of the main duties of fatherhood was provision and internalisation of this role could have tragic consequences. Julie-Marie Strange contends that the failure to protect offspring was cited as a key signifier of father-child detachment in the autobiographies she examined.<sup>247</sup> However, in my sub-sample failure to protect children, through ending their lives, was often presented in the newspaper coverage as the ultimate act of fatherly devotion.

Relationship to Offender	Number of Cases
Legitimate child	186
Illegitimate child	13
Stepchild	7
Father denied paternity	2
Foster/adopted child	2
Father uncertain of paternity	2
Unidentified	11
Total	223

*Table 1.8: The relationship between victims and offenders, January 1900-July 1914*

## 2. The Legal Process

This section examines the legal outcomes of 189 cases in this sub-sample from England and Wales. Although there are a number of cases which occurred outside of England and Wales the legal outcomes of cases from Scotland, Ireland, America, Russia, South Africa, and Continental Europe are not analysed since their legal systems all differed. Due to the fragmentary nature of the information collected from the newspapers there is not enough data to discuss concrete trends in verdicts and punishments but the material can help to elucidate more general themes in the punishment of violent crime in England and Wales for the period 1900 to 1914. The way in which a case of paternal child killing was dealt with in the legal system varied from case to case, reflecting the variety of circumstances and the effects they had on sentencing outcomes.

<sup>246</sup> 'Despair, Murder, Suicide', *The Sunday Times* (13 January 1901), p. 5.

<sup>247</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 179.

### *Charges and Verdicts*

The most common charge was murder followed by manslaughter and neglect (see Table 1.9). When these figures are broken down further it can be seen that the number of men charged with murder does not correspond with number found guilty of murder (see Table 1.10). Additionally, the verdict in cases in which the offender was originally charged with the manslaughter of their child varied enormously from being found guilty of the severer charge of murder to not guilty of manslaughter. This indicates that not all crimes were treated in the same way in this period and the reasons behind this varied as much as the treatment of the crime. Carolyn Conley argues that in the nineteenth century trial outcomes were affected by common law tradition which gave considerable leeway to judges and jurors in determining what the law required.<sup>248</sup> This was also apparent in the early twentieth century and whilst it could be argued that there were some criteria behind the verdicts paternal child killers received, individual circumstances also played their role. In Table 1.10 the number of men found 'not guilty' appears to be low considering the number of men in this sub-sample. However, because the newspapers did not follow all cases from its discovery to the punishment of the paternal child killer, this discrepancy is understandable.

Daniel Grey finds that trials of fathers who committed child homicide were heavily influenced by ideas about what constituted normative and deviant behaviour.<sup>249</sup> When a defendant otherwise fitted the criteria for 'model fatherhood' the judge and jury were more likely to take a lenient view. As discussed in the 'Relationships with Partner and Children' section behaving like a 'good' father prior to killing his child influenced the way in which the case was represented in the newspaper coverage. There were many possible factors in securing this reaction, such as affectionate behaviour, financial position and willingness to provide, sobriety, and mental illness. The findings from this sub-sample indicate that,

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<sup>248</sup> C. Conley, *Certain Other Countries: Homicide, Gender, and National Identity in Late Nineteenth Century England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales* (The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2007), p. 14.

<sup>249</sup> Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State', p. 84.

although the behaviour of paternal child killers as fathers prior to the crimes was dwelt upon in the newspaper coverage, it was discussions of their mental health which appeared to be most likely to influence the outcome of the trial.

<b>Crime Charged With</b>	<b>Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers</b>
Murder	77
Manslaughter	44
Neglect	4
Manslaughter and neglect	4
Murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide	2
Murder and attempted murder	1
Attempted murder	3
Neglect and attempted murder	1
Unidentified	53
Total	189

*Table 1.9: Crimes men were charged with in England and Wales, January 1900-July 1914*

Original Charge	Verdict	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Murder	Guilty of murder	21
	Guilty of murder but insane	21
	Guilty of manslaughter	3
	Guilty of concealment	1
	Charge withdrawn	1
	Not guilty	2
Murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide	Guilty of murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide but insane	1
Murder and attempted murder	Guilty of grievous bodily harm	1
Manslaughter	Guilty of murder	1
	Guilty of manslaughter	11
	Guilty of neglect	2
	Guilty of misdemeanour in neglecting to call in medical aid	1
	Insane, unfit to plead	1
	Not guilty	8
Neglect	Not guilty	1
Manslaughter and neglect	Not guilty	1
Attempted murder	Guilty of attempted murder	1
Unidentified		111
Total		189

*Table 1.10: The original charge in comparison to the verdict for cases from England and Wales, January 1900-July 1914*

### *Role of the NSPCC in Providing Evidence*

In nineteen of the cases (9 per cent) it was reported that a representative from the NSPCC gave evidence at trial (see Table 1.11).<sup>250</sup> The role of NSPCC testimony was to detail neglect and abuse suffered by children because of their parents' behaviour, such as their physical appearance and their living conditions. The crimes these men were sentenced for were manslaughter, ill treatment, and neglect. In these cases there were various methods of killing reported by the newspapers such as lack of medical attention, starvation, general neglect, poisoning, failure to obtain treatment for pneumonia, and physical abuse. In some cases parents may have been too impoverished to provide for their children despite their

<sup>250</sup> The Society was founded in 1884 in London under the title the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. It was renamed the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in 1889.



best intentions. In many cases of neglect parents appeared to receive a relatively light punishment. Ginger Frost states that the NSPCC had to balance defending neglected and brutalised children with the desire to keep families together.<sup>251</sup> Placing parents in prison would mean further costs for the local Board of Guardians who would have to find alternative homes for at risk children.

Verdict	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Guilty of manslaughter	4
Guilty of neglect	2
Guilty of ill treatment	1
Not guilty of manslaughter	3
Total	8

Table 1.11: The verdict of cases in which the NSPCC testified, January 1900-July 1914

### *Punishments Imposed*

The figures in Table 1.12 indicate a number of things about the punishment of paternal child killers, specifically, and men, more generally, during the period 1900 to July-1914. For men convicted of the murder of their child, punishments ranged from death to life imprisonment, either in a prison or a criminal lunatic asylum. Of the 22 men sentenced to death it was reported in just six cases that the execution was carried out. In the Judicial Statistics for England and Wales 44 per cent of people convicted of murder were sentenced to death between 1900 and 1914.<sup>252</sup> Four out of the fifteen men sentenced to death and recommended to mercy were reported to have had their sentences reprieved. In cases in which the defendant's punishment was reprieved the newspapers did not offer much, if any, information as to the reasons why, unless it was due to insanity, in which case it was stated that the sentence had been commuted to imprisonment in a criminal lunatic asylum. The reprieve of a death sentence served to demonstrate the increasingly humane approach taken to the punishment of offenders of serious crime.

<sup>251</sup> G. Frost, *Victorian Childhoods* (Praeger Publishers: Westport, 2009), p. 153.

<sup>252</sup> Judicial Statistics, England and Wales, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online [accessed November 2017].

Charge	Verdict	Punishment	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Murder	Guilty of murder	Death, execution carried out	5
		Death, commuted to life imprisonment in criminal lunatic asylum	2
		Death, reprieved	3
		Death, commuted to penal servitude for life	2
		Death, possible revision	1
		Death, outcome unknown	8
		Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
	Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	22
	Guilty of manslaughter	Three years penal servitude	1
		Ten years penal servitude	1
		Penal servitude for life	1
		Punishment	1
	Guilty of concealment	Nine months imprisonment	1
	Charge withdrawn	Discharged	1
	Not guilty of murder	Discharged	3
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	23
Murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide	Guilty of murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	1
Murder and attempted murder	Guilty of murder and grievous bodily harm	Death, outcome unknown	1
Manslaughter	Guilty of murder	Four years imprisonment	1
	Guilty of manslaughter, with extenuating circumstances	Six months imprisonment	1
	Guilty of manslaughter	Three months imprisonment	1
		Three months imprisonment with hard labour	2
		Six months imprisonment	1
		Nine months imprisonment	1
		Ten years penal servitude	2
		Penal servitude for life	2
	Guilty of neglect	Six months imprisonment with hard labour	1
		Allowed bail	1
	Guilty of misdemeanour in neglecting to call in medical aid	Punishment unknown	1
	Insane, unfit to plead	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
	Not guilty of manslaughter	Discharged	8
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	1
Neglect	Verdict unknown	Two months imprisonment with hard labour	1
		Punishment unknown	2
	Not guilty of neglect	Discharged	1
Manslaughter and neglect	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	2
	Not guilty of manslaughter and neglect	Discharged	2
Charge unknown	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	77
Total			189

*Table 1.12: Charges, verdicts and punishments for paternal child murder committed in England and Wales, January 1900-July 1914*

In this sub-sample 10 per cent of men were found guilty but insane, two of the accused were found insane and unfit to plead, and three men were found guilty and sentenced to death, but later had their sentences reprieved and were detained in a criminal lunatic asylum. Of the 46 men convicted of murder, 55 per cent were found guilty but insane. According to the Judicial Statistics for England and Wales, 30 per cent of people convicted of murder were found guilty but insane or insane on arraignment between 1900 and 1914.<sup>253</sup> Such offenders were ordered by the judge to be detained during His Majesty's pleasure (or Her Majesty's pleasure between January 1900 to January 1901) either in a criminal lunatic asylum or in prison. By contrast with fixed sentencing for ordinary crimes, detentions at His Majesty's pleasure were by definition unfixed, indeterminate sentences.<sup>254</sup> They were to be legally prolonged for as long as the offender was deemed to be a risk to the public (or themselves) and this tended to mean for as long as they were still judged insane and unable to take care of themselves, or to be safely looked after by others.<sup>255</sup>

In the 21 cases in which an insanity plea was successfully invoked multiple causal factors were discussed in the newspaper coverage and it does not appear that there was a specific combination that would lead to a finding of guilty but insane. The newspaper coverage of paternal child killers found guilty of murder but insane at the time of the crime identified a variety of forms of mental illness and reasons for their mental breakdown to explain the committal of the crime. The consumption of alcohol, suicide attempts, vague signs of madness, 'strange' behaviour, previous incarceration in an asylum, and unemployment were the most common causes and indicators of insanity. For paternal child killers whose insanity plea failed, the explanations proposed were largely the same as for cases in which the plea was successful.

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<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure', p. 224.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

The only differentiating features between those men found guilty of murder but insane and those found to be sane was their behaviour towards their family prior to the crime. In seven cases in which the accused was deemed guilty but insane it was reported he was fond of his child and in three cases it was mentioned that he was devoted to his wife. In only two cases was an argument with his wife referred to in the newspaper coverage. In the newspaper coverage of defendants who unsuccessfully pleaded insanity, other, more negative facts came to light, such as that the child was illegitimate, the crime was premeditated, and that the father's attack on his child had been ferocious. The importance attached to the way in which a defendant acted as a father and husband before murdering his children echoes Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson's findings that this was as a key factor in the determination of insanity.<sup>256</sup>

Martin Wiener claims that in the Victorian period fathers who killed their own children would more than likely be hanged as convicted male murderers were almost invariably hanged.<sup>257</sup> Yet in the early twentieth century this does not appear to hold true. In fact, as Cathryn Wilson contends paternal child murderers were more likely to be spared the death sentence than any other type of murderer.<sup>258</sup> Courtrooms could be sympathetic to men who had killed their children, mirroring the way women were treated.<sup>259</sup> Whilst some general sentencing patterns can be gleaned from this sub-sample, the sentences for paternal child killing varied due to the diversity of circumstances between one case and the next.

#### *Indictments with Partners*

Cases in the sub-sample show that paternal child killers did not always act alone in the killing of their child. In 25 per cent of the cases a wife, partner or mother of the child was also

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<sup>256</sup> Shepherd, 'One of the Best Fathers Until He Went Out of His Mind', p. 20 and Wilson, 'Mad, Sad or Bad?', p. 32. See also Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide and the State', pp. 73-92.

<sup>257</sup> Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p. 125.

<sup>258</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 207.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

brought to trial along with the father. This was mainly for manslaughter or neglect and the newspaper coverage centred on their cruel and abusive behaviour, withholding of food, and, in the case of Peculiar People and Christian Scientists, failure to obtain medical aid.<sup>260</sup> Of the cases in which enough information was provided on the charge, verdict and punishment of both the indicted parents, seven couples received the same verdict and punishment, four women received a harsher punishment than their partner, and three men received harsher punishments than their partner. In cases of neglect the mother was usually found to be more culpable than the father echoing gender assumptions of the period that her primary role was to care for the family. Daniel Grey states that the perception that a father's duty principally consisted of providing shelter and food, and remaining in steady employment, meant that married or cohabiting men accused of child neglect were considered far less culpable than women by juries.<sup>261</sup> A woman's brutality towards her children was considered especially monstrous as it was a direct contradiction of the nurturing and caring role she was supposed to embody.<sup>262</sup>

### 3. Nature of Press Coverage

In this part of the chapter the extent of newspaper coverage per case in the sub-sample is analysed. This is achieved by looking at the number of newspapers which reported on each case, the number of articles printed per case, the length of articles, and the number of articles printed at each stage of the legal process. This section builds on work done by Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg, whose work examines how and why

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<sup>260</sup> The Peculiar People were a Christian movement founded in 1838. The Peculiar People preached a puritanical form of Christianity and practised faith healing. They did not seek immediate medical care in cases of sickness, instead relying on prayer as an act of faith. Christian Science is a set of beliefs and practices belonging to the metaphysical family of new religious movements. Its founder, Mary Baker Eddy, argued that sickness is an illusion that be corrected by prayer alone. The church maintains that Christian-Science prayer is most effective when not combined with medicine.

<sup>261</sup> D. Grey, ' "More Lenient than Wilfully Cruel": Homicide Trials and 'Baby-Farming' in England and Wales in the Wake of the Children Act 1908', *Crimes and Misdemeanours*, 3 (2009), p. 75.

<sup>262</sup> Jackson, *Child Sexual Abuse in Victorian England*, p. 109.

different newspapers selected, constructed and presented a particular crime's reportage for popular consumption.<sup>263</sup> In the period 1900 to 1914, they argue that the tabloid format of newspapers changed how crime news was reported.<sup>264</sup> There was still a reliance on sensationalism but the lengthier details relating to the legal side of the case diminished due to financial constraints. Neither Cathryn Wilson nor Alesha Lister consider the extent of reporting on each case of paternal child killing and by each newspaper in their studies of newspaper representations of fathers who murdered their children. However, by examining how much space was given to cases of paternal child killing a clearer picture of how it was represented is gained. In this section it is emphasised that the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers in this sub-sample fluctuated from case to case, making it difficult to identify which case would receive a high volume of newspaper attention.

#### *Extent of Reporting on Individual Cases*

Not all cases of paternal child killing received the same amount of newspaper coverage. Table 1.13 illustrates how many newspapers in the sample reported on the total number of cases from this period: in just over half of the cases more than one newspaper reported on the case. The extent of coverage ranges from one article to 110 articles per case.<sup>265</sup> For the majority of the men in the sample between one and four articles were printed on the case, as demonstrated in Table 1.14. As can be seen in Tables 1.15 and 1.16, just over half of the articles were 50 lines or fewer (see Figure 1 for an indication of size). Such articles gave a brief précis of the case, including who the accused was, the identity of the victim(s), the location of the crime, any noteworthy details of the trial or coroner's inquest, and possible explanations for the crime. Longer articles were reserved for cases which had been

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<sup>263</sup> J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson and S. Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>265</sup> The case for which 110 articles were found was that of John Starchfield who was accused of the murder of his son in January 1914. Starchfield was eventually acquitted of the murder and discharged. The case provoked a lot of excitement as several witnesses came forward with dramatic testimony.

sensationalised in the newspaper coverage or for which there was an element of mystery about the case yet to be solved.

Number of Newspapers	Number of Cases
1	94
2	47
3	34
4	26
5	14
6	6
7	2
Total Number of Cases	223

*Table 1.13: Number of newspapers which reported on each case, January 1900-July 1914*

Number of Articles	Number of Cases
1	74
2	32
3	29
4	18
5	12
6	7
7	13
8	3
9	5
10	1
11	3
12	2
13	2
14	1
15	1
16	0
17	1
18	0
19	1
20	0
21	0
22	0
23	0
24	0
26	1
27	1
29	1
66	1
110	1
Total Number of Cases	223

*Table 1.14: Number of articles found per case, January 1900-July 1914*

Total Number of Article Lines	Number of Cases
Fewer than 10	18
10-19	25
20-29	21
30-39	13
40-49	14
50-59	13
60-69	14
70-79	11
80-89	6
90-99	11
100-149	22
150-199	17
200-249	11
250-299	4
300-349	2
350-399	2
400-449	4
450-499	2
500-599	2
600-699	3
800-899	2
1000-1999	2
2000-2999	1
3000-3999	1
4000-4999	1
12,000-12,999	1
Total Number of Cases	223

*Table 1.15: Number of lines per case, January 1900-July 1914*



## MURDER OF A CHILD.

### PLEA OF GUILTY ACCEPTED AT LIVERPOOL ASSIZES.

Sentence of death was passed at the Liverpool Assizes yesterday on Joseph Spooner, a labourer, who was charged with the murder of his young daughter, Elizabeth Alice Spooner, in Edge Hill district on February 26.

Spooner when asked to plead answered, in a loud voice, "Guilty, my Lord."

Mr. Justice Bray (to Mr. Madden, the prisoner's counsel): Have you explained to him what this means?

Mr. Madden: Yes; but I don't think I can do anything.

Some discussion followed between the Judge and the Clerk of the Assize as to whether the plea of guilty should be accepted. Generally such a plea is not accepted, and the evidence is taken as if the prisoner had made no confession, but in this instance it was apparently thought that no good purpose would be served by going on with the trial.

Sir Herbert Stevens (Clerk of Assize) then asked: You stand convicted on the charge of murder. Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed on you according to law?

Spooner: No.

Mr. Justice Bray assumed the black cap, and in low tones briefly addressed the prisoner, who interrupted with the remark "I hardly hear you, my Lord."

His Lordship, raising his voice, said the prisoner had pleaded guilty to the murder of this little girl, and he had made that plea after having the nature of the offence explained to him by the counsel, who had been assigned to him by the Court. The Judge had therefore no hesitation. It was his duty to accept that plea, and he would make no comment on the crime.

Sentence of death was then passed in accordance with the usual formula.

Figure 1.1: Article of 39 lines, *Manchester Guardian* (23 April 1914), p. 16.

As well as giving an indication of the average length of national newspaper articles on cases of paternal child killing in the period 1900 to July 1914, Figure 1.1 provides an example of the type of content likely to be reported. Both the headline and sub-headline of the article highlights what the crime was (murder), that the case had gone on to be tried at an assize court, and what the outcome of the trial was (guilty of murder). The reader also gains information on who the victim was (a child) and the general location of the crime (the case was tried in Liverpool, playing into stereotypes about the city being a violent and dangerous place). However, what is not revealed until the main body of the article is that the person accused of the child's murder was its father and that the father was sentenced to death. In keeping with the legal content of the headline and sub-headline, the focus of the article was on a specific legal aspect of the case. As is argued in section five of this chapter, the legal

side of this case formed a central part of the newspaper coverage as this is what the reading audience desired. Additionally, the article was printed in the *Manchester Guardian*, a broadsheet newspaper which was formal in style and tone and did not include much of the human interest details as in the *Daily Mirror* or *Daily Mail*.

#### *Extent of Reporting by Newspaper*

Not every case in the sub-sample was reported on by every newspaper in the selection used for this thesis. Tables 1.17 and 1.18 shows how many cases were reported on by each newspaper and the number of articles published in each newspaper. The *Manchester Guardian* followed by the *Daily Mail* printed the most articles on paternal child killers and reported on the highest proportion of cases in the sample. Table 1.19 shows how many newspaper articles were published at each stage of the reporting process. Nearly 50 per cent of the articles published in relation to this sub-sample of cases were printed after the coroner's inquest and the initial police court hearing had been carried out, the first public hearings following the victims' death. Evidence given at the coroner's inquest and police court hearing was used to determine who was involved in the crime and who would be charged. Both of these stages offered opportunities for newspaper reporters to gain more insight into the crimes and, consequently, material to write more articles about the case. Table 1.19 also attests to Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg's findings that journalists became more focused on 'pre-trial excitements' than the actual trial itself because that was where the scandalous material lay, the trial simply confirmed a criminal indictment.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> Rowbotham, Stevenson and Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain*, p. 113.

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	82
<i>Daily Mail</i>	107
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	46
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	115
<i>The Times</i>	63
<i>The Observer</i>	33
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	24

Table 1.16: Number of cases reported on by each newspaper, January 1900-July 1914

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	165
<i>Daily Mail</i>	223
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	131
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	249
<i>The Times</i>	105
<i>The Observer</i>	39
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	27

Table 1.17: Number of articles published by each newspaper, January 1900-July 1914

<b>Lines of Text</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
Fewer than 10	126
10-19	221
20-29	134
30-39	95
40-49	79
50-59	56
60-69	42
70-79	32
80-89	17
90-99	23
100-149	148
150-199	27
200-249	14
250-299	12
300-349	7
350-399	3
400-449	1
450-499	0
500-599	1

Table 1.18: Number of lines per article, January 1900-July 1914

Stages in Reporting	Number of Articles
Discovery of the killing	193
Coroner's inquest	222
Police court hearing	264
Trial in progress	57
Trial verdict	166
After the verdict	72

*Table 1.19: The amount of newspaper coverage per stage in the reporting process, January 1900-July 1914*

#### **4. Editorial Devices**

This section examines some of the editorial devices employed to construct the articles and the narratives about the cases of paternal child killing being reported on. Such devices include the headlines and sub-headlines of the articles, graphic discussions of elements of the crime, perpetual novelty, sensationalism, and photographs. By considering these mechanisms it can help to determine how paternal child killing was reported in newspapers during the period 1900 to 1914.

##### *Headlines and Sub-headlines*

Just under 50 per cent of newspaper articles used a headline specific to the case being reported on as opposed to those cases which were subsumed under a more a general headline, such as 'Central Criminal Court', 'Police', 'Assizes' or 'Summary of News' (see Table 1.20). Articles for which a general headline was used were broken up with sub-headlines, allowing the reader to scan through the article to seek out a certain case. The sub-headlines of articles which used a headline specific to the case being reported on provided extra information, usually of a sensational or shocking nature to further encourage the reader to engage with article. The articles which were reported under a sub-headline only, or did not use either a headline or sub-headline, were usually a 'teaser' article on the front page of the newspaper. These shorter articles drew attention to a longer article about the case inside the newspaper or were part of a larger section of the paper reporting on crime or news of a particular locale.

Type of Headline	Number of Articles
Specific headline	663
Sub-headline of specific headline	491
General headline	61
Sub-headline of general headline	37
Sub-headline only	47
No headline	72

*Table 1.20: Headlines of each article, January 1900-July 1914*

The nine features which were examined, as identified by their frequency in the headlines and sub-headlines, were the location of the crime, relationship of the killer(s) to the victim(s), punishment received, reference to murder victim(s), reference to mental illness, occupation of the accused, method of killing, crime committed, and descriptions of the crime. Many of the headlines and sub-headlines contained a mixture of these features, although some, such as location, did appear alone. Table 1.21 shows the frequencies of these nine features and indicates that reference to the criminal charge was made in 23 per cent of headlines and sub-headlines. The victim(s) were mentioned in 19 per cent and location of the crime in 16 per cent of the headlines and sub-headlines. Inclusion of the victim(s) functioned to both shock and intrigue the audience since the murder of a child was a tragic occurrence.

Although in 15 per cent of headlines and sub-headlines the relationship of the accused to the victim was referenced, the mention that the killer was the father specifically was less frequent than the use of 'son', or 'daughter' (or 'husband', in cases in which the wife was also killed). Some newspaper editors and journalists did not feel it necessary to state that it was the father who killed the child. These crimes were newsworthy enough to attract readers just by stating that the case was a murder and the victim was a child. Cathryn Wilson also finds that newspaper reports about paternal child killing committed in the Victorian period rarely mentioned the fact that victims of the murder were children or that the defendant was their father.<sup>267</sup> Reference was made to the sanity of the accused in the

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<sup>267</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 123.

newspaper coverage of 52 per cent of cases but only in 4 per cent of the headlines and sub-headlines. Such a discrepancy suggests that some forms of mental illness were not noteworthy enough to warrant inclusion in a headline.

Headline Feature	Number of Headlines
Location of the crime	228
Occupation of accused	35
Crime committed	334
Victim(s)	272
Relationship of accused to victim(s)	205
Punishment	63
Mental illness	61
Means of killing	82
Description of the crime	176

*Table 1.21: The most common features of headlines and sub-headlines, January 1900-July 1914*

The content of the headlines and sub-headlines was predominantly factual and conveyed basic information about the case. However, there were numerous headlines and sub-headlines in which adjectives were used to describe what type of killing occurred and, in turn, how the reader was to view this event. Reference to cases as a ‘tragedy’, ‘tragic’, or ‘sad’ was not limited to any type of case of paternal child killing in particular and were often prefixed with an adjective giving the reader another element of the crime, such as its domestic setting, the number of victims, the geographic location, or the supposed motive. The extensive use of the word ‘tragedy’ throughout the newspaper coverage of this sample indicates that many newspaper editors and journalists were willing to extend sympathy to paternal child killers as well as their victims. Despite some negative portrayals of paternal child killing as ‘foul’, ‘terrible’, and ‘gruesome’, the overall picture of paternal child killers from the headlines was not overwhelmingly condemnatory.

When mental illness was mentioned in the headlines and sub-headlines it was used to describe the father or the crime through the use of words like ‘insane’, ‘demented’ or ‘mad’. These terms were not restricted to cases in which the accused was found guilty but insane and were frequently employed prior to the case going to trial and before any official medical testimony was heard on the individual’s state of mind. Newspapers often came to

their own conclusion regarding the state of mind of a paternal child killer, due to either the nature of the crime or to lay testimony given at the coroner's inquest. Rarely were medical terms, such as 'homicidal mania' or 'delusions', used to invoke insanity in the headlines and sub-headlines. This highlights a preference for lay terminology over medical as the content of national newspapers had to be accessible for the intended audience.

### *Elements of the Killing*

The men in this sub-sample killed their children in a variety of ways, some with extreme violence, some with weapons, and some by a more indirect method, such as lack of medical attention, starvation or neglect, though these methods were by no means exclusive. There were 165 cases (73 per cent) in which the child died from a violent means of killing. Such methods include drowning, cutting the throat of the victim, strangling, shooting the child, poisoning, and injuries inflicted by physical abuse. In 36 per cent of these cases some form of weapon was used to kill or injure the child. Many weapons were domestic items, such as hammers, kitchen knives, a belt and a shoelace. In 30 cases (14 per cent) the cause of death of the victims was said to have been due to neglect or starvation, whilst in a further 6 per cent of cases death was said to be due to lack of medical attention.

Graphic accounts of the wounds inflicted by the killer, as well as detailed descriptions of the bodies of the victims, were a noticeable feature of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers during the period 1900 to July 1914. Cathryn Wilson also finds that newspaper journalists appeared to revel in reporting gory details of child murder cases.<sup>268</sup> Rosalind Crone argues that in nineteenth century newspaper reports of violent crime no details were considered too shocking or distasteful for publication, in fact the extra brutalities helped to sell newspapers.<sup>269</sup> This is also evident in the newspaper coverage of

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<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>269</sup> R. Crone, *Violent Victorians: Popular Entertainment in Nineteenth Century London* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012), p. 101.

cases of paternal child killing committed in the early twentieth century. Sensitive details about the case became public knowledge that journalists and newspaper editors relished in describing to their audience. These morbid descriptions focussed on several aspects of the killing, namely the condition of the victim's body, the wounds inflicted, and the amount of blood shed. Descriptions of the bodies of the children and the wounds they sustained were some of the few pieces of information the reader was given about the victims of the crimes. Their bodies became devices used to shock newspaper audiences.

Some of the most visceral and disturbing linguistic depictions of the victims were those that described the wounds inflicted by the father and the resulting loss of blood. For a modern day reader these descriptions seem callous and unnecessary, demonstrating a deep lack of respect for the victim(s). Yet reading these articles in bulk and in isolation from the rest of the newspaper, the portrayals of the crimes become quite repetitive and formulaic. First, the victims' wounds and blood-loss were described, followed by an account of the room in which they were found, if it was particularly shocking. The weapon was then detailed, usually a domestic item described as 'bloodstained' and positioned near to the body of the victim. George Naden was said to have cut the throats of his two sons in such a way that their 'little heads' were almost 'severed from their shoulders'.<sup>270</sup> As if this image wasn't gruesome enough the article went on to describe the room in which they were found as a 'slaughter-house' due to the amount of blood on the floor and walls.<sup>271</sup>

The description of children's heads being almost severed from their bodies was found in the newspaper coverage of seven other cases and in a further seven cases the way in which the child's throat was cut was described in graphic detail. The newspapers' willingness to describe these graphic aspects of the crimes indicates not only the level of tolerance but the appetite for such descriptions amongst newspaper readership. The violent

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<sup>270</sup> 'Week's Holocaust of Crime', *The Sunday Times* (22 November 1908), p. 7.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.



descriptions also made paternal child killing a very visible crime, bringing it into the public arena and, consequently, conveying the reader into the domestic setting of a killer.

### *Perpetual Novelty*

Another perceptible element of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers was perpetual novelty. This idea is used here to describe the phenomenon of discussing the case of paternal child killing as if no such crime had ever been committed before. However, in 1900 alone there were eighteen instances of paternal child killing reported in this selection of national newspapers, yet no reference to this cluster of cases was made in any of the newspaper articles.<sup>272</sup> In this sub-sample the language of perpetual novelty involved an exclamation at the beginning of the article that this particular case of paternal child killing was ‘one of the most shocking crimes ever committed’ or was of a ‘particularly distressing character’.<sup>273</sup> The cases reported on were not markedly different from previous cases of paternal child killing, either in the number of victims or the method of killing. Perpetual novelty was also evident in the descriptions of the crimes as ‘tragedies’. Repeatedly the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing presented the individual cases as ‘a tragedy of the saddest character’ or ‘a shocking domestic tragedy’.<sup>274</sup> This was in spite of the fact that none of the crimes described as such differed massively from previous occurrences of paternal child killing. Evidently, such terms were employed to capture and retain the attention of the newspaper audience by proclaiming to cover the most shocking crimes of the day.

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<sup>272</sup> Due to the digitisation of the newspapers used in this thesis and the ability to do a keyword search it is very easy for this observation to be made. It may have been that newspaper journalists were simply not aware of the other cases of paternal child killing that took place. However, this seems unlikely given the access journalists had to assize courts, such as the Old Bailey, and relationships they had with the police.

<sup>273</sup> ‘Maniac’s Triple Crime’, *Daily Mail* (17 August 1903), p. 3 and ‘Triple Murder in London’, *The Observer* (24 April 1910), p. 11.

<sup>274</sup> ‘Tragedy of a Home’, *Daily Mail* (15 January 1900), p. 6 and ‘A Shocking Domestic Tragedy’, *Manchester Guardian* (16 November 1904), p. 12.

### *Sensationalism and Public Reaction*

This section examines three cases which were sensationalised by the press as well as those which excited noticeable public interest. As posited in the methodology chapter sensational cases were not just those that received the most newspaper attention but depended on perceptions of normality.<sup>275</sup> These cases did not represent the most violent of cases but they all had elements of the unusual and shocking about them. These cases demonstrate that sensationalism in this period was a result of an element of the unusual as well as the newspapers themselves using dramatic language to describe the events and create hyperbole around them. Daniel Grey finds that there was a degree of uniformity and sympathy in how cases of infanticide were represented by newspapers in the Edwardian period.<sup>276</sup> However, as the following cases show the newspaper coverage was not so uniform and much more variable in how paternal child killers were represented. Supportive or hostile coverage of paternal child killer was dependant on the explanation given for killing the child. If this reason was deemed unacceptable then the reaction from the newspapers and the public could be unfavourable and cast the paternal child killer in a negative light.

One of the most sensational cases in this sub-sample, due to the high volume and lengthy time span of the newspaper coverage, was that of Arthur Devereux, who murdered his wife and two infant children. Much of the intrigue surrounding this case stemmed from the discovery of the bodies in a tin trunk stored at a furniture repository and Devereux's insistence that it was his wife who killed the children and herself, and that he merely packed the bodies into the trunk out of panic. Instead, it transpired that Devereux poisoned his family, packed the bodies into a trunk, sealed the trunk with glue so as to conceal the smell of the decomposing bodies, and then moved away from the area in order to live as a single man. The newspapers made much of the fact that Devereux was a chemist and that bottles

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<sup>275</sup> See 'Methodology' chapter, p. 63.

<sup>276</sup> Grey, 'Agonised Weeping', p. 469.

of poison were found in his flat, adding a sinister undertone to the cause of death and the discovery of the bodies hermeneutically sealed in a tin trunk.

Newspaper coverage of this case lasted for six months, from the discovery of the trunk until almost two months after Devereux's execution. Since Devereux denied killing his family the case was prolonged in order to determine the cause of the deaths and whether Devereux was responsible for them. New articles were published as additional pieces of information came to light and parts of the mystery were solved. For example, a month after the first piece of newspaper coverage it was claimed that Devereux was a 'man of criminal instincts' and revealed that he had been in prison for committing fraud.<sup>277</sup> This was another occasion for the newspapers to print material pertaining to Devereux as well as to reveal his criminal tendencies.

Many descriptions, particularly of the courtroom and public response to the crimes, were melodramatic, resembling a murder mystery story rather than a real instance of paternal child killing. The newspaper coverage detailed the huge crowds which awaited Devereux at the police station, the coroner's inquest, and his trial at the Old Bailey as well as the number of vehicles which 'thronged the roads' nearby.<sup>278</sup> In these descriptions the reader gained a sense of what the atmosphere was like at the public events of this case. One such account in the *Daily Mirror* depicted the moment when Devereux was found guilty of murder, describing how 'women stood up and grew pale, men trembled and shook, the whole court seemed to gape beneath the intensity of that one dramatic moment'.<sup>279</sup> Inclusion of these details heightened public feeling against Devereux. Whereas at the beginning of his trial he was commended for being the 'coolest man' in the Old Bailey, some

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<sup>277</sup> 'Devereux Sent for Trial', *Daily Express* (18 May 1905), p. 5.

<sup>278</sup> 'Tragedy of the Tin Trunk', *Daily Mirror* (17 April 1905), p. 4.

<sup>279</sup> 'Devereux as an Author', *Daily Mirror* (31 July 1905), p. 5.

newspapers later questioned why he showed no emotion when on trial for the murder of his family.<sup>280</sup>

The case of John Crozier, an Irish magistrate, also attracted a lot of newspaper attention. Crozier, along with his second wife, was charged with the manslaughter of his son who died from starvation. After the death of his first wife he employed a nurse to look after his three children and she later became his wife. It was alleged that his second wife treated the children of his first marriage in a cruel manner and her own children with affection. Crozier's role in his child's death was seen as secondary to his wife's although it was evident from the newspaper coverage that he was aware that his son was being abused. According to the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* after his second marriage he was 'ostracised by the elite of Fermanagh' to the point that his name 'became anathema'.<sup>281</sup> Crozier was a county magistrate for Fermanagh, ex-High Sheriff of the county, and also served for years on the Grand Jury at the Assizes. His defence lawyer argued that Crozier had been depicted as a county magnate 'fattening himself on luxuries' while his children starved but he was actually a 'poor, miserable wretch'.<sup>282</sup> Although the starvation of a child was captivating enough to gain attention from English national newspapers, the main point of interest in this case appeared to derive from Crozier's prominent social position as a pillar of the legal establishment and the fact that in his second marriage he married beneath him.

As with the case of Arthur Devereux, the 'unusual' amount of interest taken in the case, and the reason for this interest, was commented on by the *Manchester Guardian*.<sup>283</sup> Crozier's lawyer claimed 'it had been written up in every newspaper in the United Kingdom'.<sup>284</sup> He also implored the jury to 'dismiss from their minds the newspaper presentation of the case' before they made their decision on the outcome of the trial,

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<sup>280</sup> 'Devereux in the Witness-Box', *Daily Mirror* (29 July 1905), p. 5 and 'Devereux as an Author', *Daily Mirror* (31 July 1905), p. 5.

<sup>281</sup> 'Fermanagh Manslaughter Case', *Manchester Guardian* (18 December 1912), p. 12.

<sup>282</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>283</sup> 'Fermanagh Manslaughter Case', *Manchester Guardian* (18 December 1912), p. 12.

<sup>284</sup> 'Crozier Manslaughter Trial', *Manchester Guardian* (19 December 1912), p. 5.

recognising the power of newspapers to persuade public opinion.<sup>285</sup> When the couple's trial began they became 'the subjects of a hostile demonstration' outside of the courthouse, so much so that a large police force was present to keep the crowd in check.<sup>286</sup> The newspaper coverage emphasised Crozier's former upper-middle class social position to increase the sensation behind the crime. Although he was not outright condemned in the newspaper coverage, newspapers used Crozier's respectability and inability to look after his son to shame him.

Public reaction to paternal child killers was not always negative. Henry Green was found guilty of the murder of his illegitimate daughter and was sentenced to death. He claimed that the reason he killed his daughter was because he was suspicious of his wife's acquaintance with another man, although his wife denied these allegations. He also said that he loved the child and had killed her to prevent her from leading an 'immoral life'.<sup>287</sup> Green had recently returned from the Boer War as a private in the 4<sup>th</sup> East Surrey Regiment, during which time he sent a proportion of his army pay home to his wife. Despite murdering his daughter public reaction to Green was, as the *Daily Express* commented, remarkably sympathetic with several thousand people turning out to support him at the coroner's court.<sup>288</sup> The crowd was reportedly so big that special constables had to be requested in case of an emergency. Conversely, the child's mother received 'a storm of hooting and hissing' when she emerged from the coroner's inquest.<sup>289</sup> Since the newspaper coverage emphasised Green's supposedly virtuous reasons for killing his daughter and his wife's mistrustful behaviour, the readers were influenced to react to this case in a certain way. Green's wife was condemned for her supposed immorality whilst Green was supported for protecting his child from immorality. These three cases demonstrate the variety of reactions

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<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>286</sup> 'J. P. and His Wife', *Daily Express* (22 November 1912), p. 1.

<sup>287</sup> *Daily Express* (16 September 1902), p. 1.

<sup>288</sup> 'Crowd Cheers an Alleged Murderer', *Daily Express* (16 September 1902), p. 5.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

in the press and by the public not only between cases but how public feeling towards a paternal child killer could change as new information was brought to light or a verdict was reached.

### *Inclusion of Images*

In 3.5 per cent of cases a picture was included in the newspaper coverage of the cases in this sub-sample. Ninety-six of these pictures were photographs and three were drawings. As can be seen in Table 1.22 nearly 50 per cent of pictures printed in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample were coded as 'institutional', 44 per cent were 'personal', and 6 per cent were 'environmental'.<sup>290</sup> In Table 1.23 it is detailed where in the newspaper the images were printed. Just under half of the photographs were printed along with an article.

Photographs published separately to the article, in a 'picture gallery' section or on a page containing unrelated news items, were still deemed newsworthy enough to be printed without an accompanying piece of text, although there were captions explaining the content of the photographs. In Table 1.24 it can be seen that the *Daily Mirror* printed the largest number of images relating to the cases in the sub-sample. Usually the same photograph or selection of photographs would be used throughout the newspaper coverage, new pictures only being printed if the case received a lot of attention from the public. The inclusion of a photograph in an article was reserved for those cases which received more than average newspaper coverage, reflecting public interest in the case and the desire to put a face to a name. Most of the photographs included in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample relate to the case of John Starchfield, accused of the murder of his son. The case for the prosecution rested on little evidence and in an attempt to retain reader interest new photographs of different witnesses who claimed to have seen the victim prior to the death or those who found the body.

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<sup>290</sup> For the methodology used to code the images included in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases see the 'Methodology' chapter, p. 64.

Subject of Picture	Sub-Category of the Picture	Total Number
Personal	Offender(s)	24
	Victim(s)	9
	Family	11
	Other	0
Institutional	Offender in prison	1
	Offender with policeman	3
	Offender in court	10
	Police	2
	Judge	2
	Lawyer	2
	Witnesses	16
	Other	14
Environmental	Location of crime	2
	Home of victim	1
	Home of offender	0
	Other	3

*Table 1.22: Subjects and sub-categories of the pictures used in the newspaper coverage, January 1900-July 1914*

Placement in the Newspaper	Total Number
Accompanies article	49
In picture gallery section	5
Separate to article	18
Picture only	12
Front cover	15

*Table 1.23: Placement of picture in the newspaper coverage, January 1900-July 1914*

Newspaper	Total Number
<i>Daily Express</i>	23
<i>Daily Mail</i>	8
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	68
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	0
<i>The Times</i>	0
<i>The Observer</i>	0
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	0

*Table 1.24: Total number of pictures per newspaper, January 1900-July 1914*

One case that received a lot of newspaper coverage for a prolonged period of time was that of Arthur Devereux, discussed above. The two images (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3) relating to this case coded as ‘personal’ differ in how Devereux is depicted. The first image, a photograph, shows Devereux standing at his leisure, in a relaxed pose, and casually attired. At this stage in the newspaper coverage Devereux had not yet been arrested for the murder of his family. In the second image, a sketch, Devereux is drawn, gaunt and looks quite

villainous. By May 1905 Devereux had been charged with the murder of his family and was on trial, it is evident that legal proceedings were taking their toll.



*Figure 1.2: Photograph of Arthur Devereux, Daily Mirror (18 April 1905), p. 11.*



*Figure 1.3: Drawing of Arthur Devereux, Daily Mirror (13 May 1905), p. 6.*



## 5. Understandings of Mental Illness

In the final section of this chapter the way in which the sanity of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample was represented in the newspaper coverage is examined. Newspaper accounts of paternal child killing allow access to a range of different understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. While medical and legal records, as used by Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson, permit this to some extent, newspaper articles demonstrate the way in which the public understood mental health in relation to the mitigation of violent crime and how this was packaged for the consumption of a general readership. In 51 per cent of cases some form of mental illness was mentioned in the newspaper reports, this includes the alleged perpetrator alluding to some form of mental illness, witness testimony on their mental wellbeing, invocation of the insanity plea by the counsel for the defence during a trial, and medical testimony on their sanity. Thirty-six of the cases were tried at the Old Bailey between 1900 and 1913 and the mental health of the accused prior to the crime was discussed in 54 per cent of trial transcripts but only 48 per cent of the related newspaper reports.<sup>291</sup> These trial transcripts and their related newspaper coverage are used throughout this section to compare how, and to what extent, newspaper journalists integrated and adapted the testimony of lay witnesses, medical experts, and legal professionals for the newspaper articles. Within the press coverage, lay interpretations and explanations of mental illness in cases of paternal child killing were clearly prioritised over

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<sup>291</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 14 June 2018), April 1900, trial of Charles Henry Miles (t19000402-274), October 1901, trial of James John Richardson (t19011021-747), April 1902, trial of William George Burley (t19020407-316), October 1902, trial of Frank Gavilla (t19021020-766), October 1902, trial of Henry Williams (t19021020-735), September 1903, trial of Herbert Madden (t19030908-647), February 1904, trial of James Valentine Curry (t19040208-197), May 1904, trial of William James Folkard (t19040516-449), September 1905, trial of Henry Walter Popple (t19050912-708), March 1906, trial of James Benson (t19060305), June 1906, trial of Charles Henry Turner (t19060625-60), October 1906, trial of Alfred Robert Rogers (t19061022-28), May 1907, trial of Henry Augustus Berney (t19070528-32), May 1908, trial of Charles Everard Fox (t19080526-44), May 1910, trial of Henry James Higginbottom (t19100531-31), December 1910, trial of Stanley Dennis (t19101206-12), December 1910, trial of Ernest Arthur Martin Boyle (t19101206-27), October 1911, trial of Albert Gale (t19111010-32), and February 1912, trial of Walter James Limpus (t19120227-40).

medical and legal understandings. This was done to keep the newspaper articles accessible to a wide readership. This section looks at personal accounts of mental breakdown, lay evidence, the testimony of medical experts, and legal understandings, as well as physical and non-physical causes of mental illness.

### *Personal Accounts of Breakdowns in Mental Health*

Personal accounts revealed what the defendant believed to be the cause of his breakdown in mental health and the reason why he killed his child. Some fathers stated it was a mental illness that was the driving force behind killing their child in statements to the police, testimony at the coroner's inquests, criminal trials, and in suicide notes. A number of fathers stated that the fear of their family being in a state of poverty triggered an insane reaction. Indeed, Thomas Killoran requested that the 'state of his mind and his poverty' be taken into account during his trial.<sup>292</sup> A number of fathers claimed that an overwhelming urge caused them to kill or injure their child with many men claiming that they must have been 'out [of their] mind at the time'.<sup>293</sup> The suggestion by these men that they themselves were mentally ill at the time of the crime demonstrates that it was generally known by the defendants and among the wider public that a verdict of guilty but insane would mean that the death sentence would be avoided.

The language used by paternal child killers to discuss their own sanity included terms such as 'muddled', 'confused', 'mad', 'crazed', 'dazzled', and 'queer'. Descriptions of the state of the brain and head, such as his 'brain was in a whirl', he was 'out of [his] senses', his 'head [was] gone', and he was 'out of [his] mind', were also prevalent. In the nineteenth century it was believed that mental illness had a physical origin and by the early twentieth century medical health care professionals began to posit that mental illness had a

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<sup>292</sup> 'Child Murder Charge', *Daily Mail* (19 April 1912).

<sup>293</sup> 'Police', *The Times* (7 March 1900), p. 14, 'Sentenced to Death', *Daily Mail* (21 July 1905), p. 3, 'The Kensal Rise Crime', *Daily Mail* (15 September 1906), p. 3, 'Exhumation Sequel', *Daily Mail* (3 June 1907), p. 4, and 'A Father Charged with Murder', *Manchester Guardian* (1 September 1908), p. 4.

psychological origin. That some men continued to locate mental illness in physical illness suggests that medical theories took some time to assimilate into general thinking. Ali Haggett contends physical symptoms were viewed as 'more acceptable' to the patient, his family, and his friends than the underlying emotional cause.<sup>294</sup> Whilst these men had an understanding of the legal implications of being found insane at the time they killed their children, discussion of their sanity reflected lay knowledge rather than medical understandings.

### *Lay Evidence*

In both the newspaper coverage and the Old Bailey trial transcripts more space was given to lay evidence of the defendant's mental wellbeing than to medical testimony or the word of legal professionals.<sup>295</sup> Lay witnesses provided examples of the symptoms and signs of a defendant's breakdown in mental health as they were the people who knew him best, lived with or close to him, and worked with him.<sup>296</sup> As Roger Smith posits, medical experts described symptoms and offered an opinion about what these symptoms implied about a person's state of mind, while lay witnesses reported on observable signs and the potential

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<sup>294</sup> A. Haggett, 'Masculinity and Mental Health: The Long View', *The Psychologist*, 27 (2014), p. 428.

<sup>295</sup> See *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 14 June 2018), April 1900, trial of Charles Henry Miles (t19000402-274), October 1901, trial of James John Richardson (t19011021-747), April 1902, trial of William George Burley (t19020407-316), October 1902, trial of Henry Williams (t19021020-735), May 1904, trial of William James Folkard (t19040516-449), June 1906, trial of Charles Henry Turner (t19060625), October 1906, Alfred Robert Rogers (t19061022-28), March 1906, trial of James Benson (t19060305-45), May 1907, trial of Henry Augustus Berney (t19070528-32), May 1908, trial of Charles Everard Fox (t19080526-44), May 1910, trial of Henry James Higginbottom (t19100531-31), December 1910, trial of Stanley Dennis (t19101206-12), February 1912, and Walter James Limpus (t19120227-40).

<sup>296</sup> For a discussion of the importance of lay evidence in definitions of insanity see G. Rychner, 'Temporary Fits, Animal Passions: Insanity in Victorian Capital Trials, 1890-1935', *Health and History*, 20 (2018), pp. 28-51, A. Mauger, *The Cost of Insanity in Nineteenth Century Ireland: Public, Voluntary and Private Asylum Care* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2018), C. Cox, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland, 1820-1900* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012), J. Melling and B. Forsythe, *The Politics of Madness: The State, Insanity, and Society in England, 1845-1914* (Routledge: London, 2006), J. Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity: Madness and Mad-Doctors in the English Court* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1995), and R. Smith, 'Expertise and Causal Attribution in Deciding between Crime and Mental Disorder', *Social Studies of Science*, 19 (1985), pp. 67-98.

explanations for their actions.<sup>297</sup> This was the case with the lay evidence given at Henry Higginbottom's trial in which the physical and outwards signs of his insanity were emphasised by lay witnesses. The evidence of the medical expert only consisted of details which were relevant to the legal conception of insanity. Jade Shepherd argues that in the nineteenth century mental health experts contended that insanity had a physical cause in order to claim that mental illness was a medical problem and, therefore, distinguish medical theories from popular ideas. However, it is clear that by the early twentieth century, as understandings of mental illness became less rooted in the physical and more in the psychological, physical causes of mental illness became more associated with lay testimony.

In the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample lay evidence of the accused's sanity centred on their physical appearance and their behaviour prior to the crimes. These descriptions were vague with witnesses stating that the defendant had shown 'signs of mental derangement' but with no further explanation, at least not recorded in the newspaper, of what these signs consisted of. Other descriptions such as 'queer', 'peculiar', and 'strange' were also vague as to what was actually meant by them. Use of these words indicates that many lay witnesses did not have the requisite medical knowledge with which to discuss insanity so discussed it in their own terms. Descriptions of physical appearance and behaviour were outward signs of insanity and, therefore, accessible to lay witnesses. Georgina Rychner finds in her study on the use of the insanity plea in Australian capital trials that a popular language of insanity operated alongside that of medical expertise.<sup>298</sup> That is evident in the newspaper coverage of the sub-sample of cases and Old Bailey trial transcripts used for this chapter. Unlike, the Australian context, this popular language was also used by medical professionals as is explored in the next section.

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<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>298</sup> Rychner, 'Temporary Fits, Animal Passions', p. 40.

### *The Testimony of Medical Experts*

In 15 per cent of cases the newspaper articles reported that a medical expert testified at trial, as can be seen in Table 1.25. Just because medical evidence was given on a defendant's mental health did not always mean that the defendant would be found guilty but insane (see Table 1.26). Indeed, Joel Eigen finds, for the period 1844 to 1900, that when rates of medical participation and acquittal are placed side by side there is no obvious relationship between them.<sup>299</sup> In twelve cases (5 per cent) in this sub-sample it was reported that a total of sixteen medical experts gave evidence: four gave evidence for the prosecution, seven for the defence, and it was not stated in the newspaper coverage for the remaining five who they testified for (see Table 1.27 for a full breakdown of the medical experts whose testimony was reported in the newspaper coverage). There does not appear to be any correspondence between whether a witness testified for the defence or the prosecution and the likelihood of finding a defendant sane or insane. One witness, Dr Scott, medical officer of Holloway Prison, testified in six different cases in this sub-sample, four for the defence and two for the prosecution. Dr Scott did not give evidence in accordance to who he was testifying for. In one case when testifying for the defence he thought that the defendant was sane at the time of the crime. Similarly, in both cases when he testified for the prosecution he found the defendant insane.

Verdict	Number of Cases
Guilty of murder	7
Guilty of murder but insane	12
Guilty of murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide but insane	1
Guilty of manslaughter	1
Guilty of assault	1
Guilty of grievous bodily harm	1
Total	23

*Table 1.25: Verdict of cases in which medical testimony was given on sanity, January 1900-July 1914*

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<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Punishment	Number of Cases	
	Medical Testimony	No Medical Testimony
Death, execution carried out	3	2
Death, commuted to life imprisonment in a criminal lunatic asylum	2	0
Death, reprieved	1	2
Death, commuted to penal servitude for life	0	2
Death, outcome unknown	0	10
Death, possible revision	1	0
2 months imprisonment	0	1
3 months imprisonment	0	3
3 months imprisonment with hard labour	0	2
6 months imprisonment	0	1
6 months hard labour	0	2
9 months imprisonment	0	2
3 years penal servitude	0	1
4 years imprisonment	0	1
10 years penal servitude	1	2
Penal servitude for life	0	3
Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	15	10
Total	23	44

*Table 1.26: Comparison of the outcomes of trials according to punishment and the use of medical testimony in cases in which insanity was invoked, January 1900-July 1914*

Title of Medical Expert	Number Reported in the Newspaper Coverage
Prison medical officer	19
Deputy prison medical officer	1
Asylum medical superintendent	2
Prison surgeon	5
Assistant medical officer at an asylum	2
Doctor	2
Medical practitioner	1
Medical superintendent of an infirmary	1
Total	33

*Table 1.27: The number of experts referred to in the newspaper coverage, January 1900-July 1914*

It was not always reported in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers found guilty but insane that medical evidence had been given at their trial. After cross-checking with the trial transcripts of the 36 cases tried at the Old Bailey between 1900 to 1913, in nine cases no medical testimony was reported in the newspaper coverage at all despite at least one medical expert testifying on the mental health of the accused in each case. Evidently, newspapers picked out the details of cases of paternal child killing that would sell. This meant that some of the medical evidence given during a defendant's trial was not recorded

and that some testimony was at more of a premium than others. Medical testimony given at the Old Bailey, and by extension other assize courts, was condensed in the newspaper coverage and tended only to consist of whether they were in a fit state to plead and whether they were insane at the time they committed the crime. Medical witnesses also offered their opinion as to whether the prisoner was still insane, whether he understood the quality of the act he was charged with and the gravity of the charge, and the type of insanity they were suffering from, although this seems to have been less important.

Medical experts who testified on the mental health of paternal child killers adapted their testimony to fit the definition of insanity as prescribed in the M'Naughtan Rules.<sup>300</sup> Of course, when giving testimony in a court of law medical experts had to speak to the law's definition of insanity. Joel Eigen argues that mental states were of obvious importance to the determination of criminal culpability but only to the extent that witnesses introducing various different types of insanity could speak to the law's definition of insanity, the failure to know right from wrong.<sup>301</sup> Legal conceptions of insanity were of more importance than medical understandings of insanity in cases in which the defendant's mental health had a bearing on their criminal culpability. Legal definitions of insanity derived from the M'Naughtan Rules offered a straightforward way of interpreting responsibility for a crime and allowed for a certain amount of leeway for different acts committed under different circumstances to be deemed the result of insanity. The M'Naughtan Rules were open-ended to such an extent that various causes, symptoms and signs could be proposed and still lead to a finding of guilty but insane. That medical evidence was sensitive to the questions and demands of the legal profession, and that the legal profession sought such input, underlines that the relationship between the law and mental health professionals was co-operative and reciprocal.

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<sup>300</sup> See 'Literature Review' Footnote 150 for a discussion of the M'Naughtan Rules.

<sup>301</sup> J. Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock: Defending the Diagnosis, 1760-1913* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2016), p. 1.

Although the M'Naughtan Rules provided medical experts and legal professionals with a framework with which to interpret allegedly insane behaviour, it is clear that the boundaries of what constituted insanity under the Rules were imprecise. Fourteen of the sixteen medical experts spoke of the defendant's state of mind in terms of the M'Naughtan Rules. At the trial of Henry Popple two medical experts gave evidence on his sanity and whether or not they thought he was responsible for his actions at the time he killed his three children. Dr Stoddart, assistant medical officer at Bethlem Hospital, gave evidence for the defence and believed Popple was 'suffering from melancholia at the time', and claimed that he would have certified him insane three days prior to killing his children.<sup>302</sup> Dr Scott, medical officer of Brixton prison, gave evidence for the prosecution and stated that 'he could not have certified him to be insane' since he thought that Popple 'knew the nature of the acts'.<sup>303</sup> Yet, he conceded that 'owing to the extreme state of despondency which he was in at the time' he did not 'fully [realise] the quality of the acts', quoting directly from the M'Naughtan Rules.<sup>304</sup> The conflicting opinions in the testimony of medical experts demonstrates that insanity was loosely defined. It also highlights the flexibility with which medical experts could operate in the courtroom. The spectrum of mental wellbeing and mental illness was broad, encompassing different mental states and varied over time. As medical witnesses grew accustomed to giving medical evidence according to the definition of legal conceptions of insanity they became adept at stretching the M'Naughtan Rules.<sup>305</sup>

Most of the terms used in the medical testimony recorded in both the newspaper coverage and the trial transcripts of the cases that went to the Old Bailey were similar to those used by lay witnesses. The main difference between the two types of testimony was that medical evidence presented an opinion as to whether the individual was insane at the

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<sup>302</sup> Central Criminal Court', *The Times* (14 September 1905), p. 10.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>305</sup> T. Ward, 'Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in England, 1843-1939' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: De Montford University of Leicester, 1996), p. 72.



time of crime, whether he knew right from wrong, and whether he was fit to stand trial. The blend of medical and lay terminology suggests that medical experts on insanity thought that their testimony might be most effective and understood most clearly if they could present it in a more basic manner. Medical involvement with legal proceedings was characterised by flexibility, reflecting and reacting to the needs and views of the judiciary.<sup>306</sup> This was evident in both the transcripts of the Old Bailey trials as well as the newspaper coverage of the cases. This suggests that medical experts who were familiar with testifying in criminal trials, such as prison medical officers, constructed their testimony for a lay audience. Their testimony did not contain particularly medical or scientific terminology but terms that a non-specialist audience, such as a jury, was likely to understand.

After comparing the trial transcripts of cases tried at the Old Bailey and the relevant newspaper articles, it is evident that medical experts testifying on mental health used accessible language which would have been understood by the everyday reader. From the Old Bailey trial transcripts, it is clear that medical men were not rushing to the courtroom with new theories of insanity to explain the crimes of supposedly insane paternal child killers. Over a thirteen year period (the Old Bailey trial transcripts ceased publication in 1913), the specific forms of mental illness discussed by medical experts were very similar: depression, delusions, melancholia, epilepsy, and temporary insanity were all used with regularity. Homicidal impulsive insanity, homicidal seizure, and neurasthenia were diagnosed in one case each and in each of the cases a verdict of guilty of murder but insane was given. Neither the regularly diagnosed mental illnesses nor the infrequently ones received much coverage in the newspapers. The preference was to use lay testimony to discuss the symptoms and causes of the defendant's mental state. Medical experts spoke in terms and phrases relevant and recognisable to the intended audience, the jury and the judge. This is contradictory to what Joel Eigen finds in the trial transcripts of the Old Bailey in

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<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

the period 1760 to 1913. Eigen argues that a whole host of different types of mental illness were proposed by medical experts in the Old Bailey in an attempt to claim unique and abstract knowledge beyond the remit of the layperson.<sup>307</sup> The findings from this sub-sample demonstrate that this was not strictly the case and that actually medical experts were adept at making their testimony relevant and accessible to lay witnesses, jury members, and judges.

### *Legal Understandings*

The newspaper coverage of paternal child killers thought to be insane also provided evidence of the legal view of what constituted insanity and responsibility for a crime. Newspapers reported the circumstances under which lawyers for the defence put forward an insanity plea, the response of the prosecuting lawyer, and how the judge interpreted a trial in which an insanity plea was raised. The discrepancies and vagaries of what constituted the legal interpretation of insanity can be seen in the case of Denis O'Hara. At his trial the lawyer for his defence said that the way in which O'Hara murdered his child was 'suggestive of his insanity'.<sup>308</sup> The lawyer for the prosecution, however, questioned whether the testimony given by medical experts, both of whom drew attention to O'Hara's melancholic and depressed demeanour, was anything more than their inferences from the facts and asked the jury to form their own individual judgement. The judge warned against finding someone mad because of the 'unusually shocking nature of his crime' as that would give legitimacy to any claim of insanity in a murder case just because it had been committed in a 'mad kind of way'.<sup>309</sup> Further, he argued that for an individual to be held not responsible he must be deemed to have been suffering from a mental disease which impaired his judgement and that such people should not be punished.

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<sup>307</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 5.

<sup>308</sup> 'Manchester Summer Assizes', *Manchester Guardian* (18 July 1900), p. 3.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The lawyer for the defence of William Burley stated that there was no adequate motive for the crime and that the only rational explanation for the act of the prisoner was that he was insane at the time, and not responsible for his actions.<sup>310</sup> It was reported that Burley was 'very fond' of the daughter he murdered which lent credibility to the idea that the crime was the result of insanity.<sup>311</sup> Similarly, the defence lawyer of Samuel Atherley, who murdered his wife and two children, claimed that the injuries inflicted on his victims were not the work of a 'cold, deliberate criminal' but of a lunatic and claimed insanity on behalf of his client.<sup>312</sup> In these cases their lawyers contended that it was the act of killing the child which constituted insanity, rather than an illness of psychological origin, highlighting the defence strategies thought likely to sway a jury in their client's favour.

#### *Physical Causes of Mental Illness*

Newspaper coverage of paternal child killers thought to be insane revealed a myriad of explanations for breakdowns in mental health. In this sub-sample supposed causes of insanity included physical causes, such as an illness or head injury, depression or melancholia, suicidal tendencies, and heredity, as well as non-physical causes, such as unemployment, poverty, grief, the influence of alcohol, and the impact of war. Samantha Pegg argues that in the Victorian period there was no consensus in the medical community as to the causes or consequences of insanity; it took a number of forms and its symptoms were elusive.<sup>313</sup> This is evident in this sub-sample of cases as revealed by the number and breadth of causes and symptoms of mental illness proposed in the newspaper coverage. The combination of physical and non-physical causes of mental illness largely proposed by lay

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<sup>310</sup> 'Sad Murder Charge', *Daily Express* (10 April 1902), p. 7.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>312</sup> 'The Assizes', *The Times* (13 November 1909), p. 4.

<sup>313</sup> S. Pegg, ' "Madness is a Woman": Constance Kent and Victorian Constructions of Female Insanity', *Liverpool Law Review*, 30 (2009), p. 214.

witnesses, in both the newspaper coverage and the trial transcripts of cases tried at the Old Bailey, reinforces the view that understandings of mental illness were porous and broad.

Illness and head injuries were one of the most prevalent causes of mental illness identified in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of paternal child killers. Medical experts had long entertained the probable effects of head injuries due to the model of insanity which argued that mental illness had a physical origin.<sup>314</sup> In the newspaper coverage pertaining to the case of Herbert Madden it was stated that ‘some years ago he fell downstairs and injured his head’.<sup>315</sup> Since the fall on his head he had been ‘very strange’ at times when he drank alcohol.<sup>316</sup> Similarly, Herbert Columbell ‘suffered from pains in his head’ and had had ‘influenza three times’, after which he attempted to commit suicide.<sup>317</sup> James Cartwright ‘suffered from pneumonia’ which ‘affected his reason’.<sup>318</sup> Additionally, a fortnight prior to murdering his three children he had ‘an attack of pneumonia’ and since then he had ‘behaved like a madman’, pacing the house and garden at night and using threats of violence.<sup>319</sup> The connection between physical illness and mental breakdown highlights how insanity was conceptualised as a physical disease with psychological consequences. Further, it shows the harmful and lasting effects of being physically incapacitated by illness.

Depression, or melancholia, was another commonly invoked cause of mental illness, although pertaining to what exactly was not always clear in the newspaper coverage. Joel Eigen comments that towards the end of the nineteenth century male defendants were repeatedly diagnosed as suffering from melancholia, especially when they had killed their

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<sup>314</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 121.

<sup>315</sup> ‘Central Criminal Court’, *The Times* (10 September 1903), p. 2.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>317</sup> ‘The Assizes’, *The Times* (15 June 1908), p. 3 and ‘Insane Murderer’, *The Observer* (14 June 1908), p. 8.

<sup>318</sup> ‘Terrible Murder Near Wolverhampton’, *The Observer* (16 August 1903), p. 7.

<sup>319</sup> ‘Mad Father’s Crime’, *Daily Express* (17 August 1903), p. 5.

own children.<sup>320</sup> It was not uncommon to read that the defendant had been ‘very melancholy’ prior to killing his children.<sup>321</sup> For instance, Henry Popple ‘suffered from attacks of depression’.<sup>322</sup> The medical expert for the defence expressed the opinion that the prisoner was ‘suffering from melancholia at the time’.<sup>323</sup> The medical expert testifying for the prosecution said that ‘owing to the state of extreme despondency’ at the time he committed the crimes he did not think the defendant ‘fully realised the quality of his acts’, his judgement being ‘warped by his despondency’.<sup>324</sup> Melancholia was a well-established form of mental illness by the early twentieth century and was an understandable explanation for crimes committed while depressed. This shows how a change in behaviour or deviance from ‘normal’ behaviour was viewed as indicative of mental illness.

Reference was made to an insane family member throughout the period 1900 to July 1914, highlighting the persistence of this understanding of the cause of insanity. An insane family member offered an explanation for a paternal child killer’s insane behaviour, one that was understandable to lay readers. Heredity had long been seen as a causal factor in the development of mental illness and came to be viewed as the biological principle underlying all forms of deviancy.<sup>325</sup> The suggestion of biological inheritance of mental illness had long been part of expert testimony and it was not unusual for a medical witness to defer to the mental health of the accused’s relatives.<sup>326</sup> When reference to an insane family member and inherited insanity was made in the newspaper coverage, it was usually detailed in one sentence: ‘there was insanity in [the] family’.<sup>327</sup> The lasting resonance of this cause of

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<sup>320</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 40.

<sup>321</sup> ‘The Covent Garden Tragedy’, *The Sunday Times* (15 September 1901), p. 8.

<sup>322</sup> ‘Central Criminal Court’, *The Times* (14 September 1905), p. 10.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>325</sup> A. Scull, *The Insanity of Place/The Place of Insanity: Essays on the History of Psychiatry* (Routledge: London, 2006), p. 119.

<sup>326</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 133.

<sup>327</sup> ‘“An Awful Sudden Impulse”’, *Manchester Guardian* (3 June 1913), p. 7, ‘Consumption Tragedy’, *Daily Mail* (17 June 1910), p. 3, ‘Murdered Family’, *Daily Mail* (27 June 1910), p. 6, and *The Times* (10 April 1902), p. 15.

mental illness shows how deeply rooted the belief was that mental illness was first and foremost a condition inherited from a family member rather than one caused by an outside influence.

Previous incarceration in an asylum was also noted as an indicator of mental illness in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample. This offered concrete evidence that the defendant had been considered insane by a medical professional at some point prior to the crime. In the newspaper coverage of Herbert Madden it was pointed out that, 'he was at one time in a lunatic asylum'.<sup>328</sup> Similarly, John Foote had previously been confined in a lunatic asylum.<sup>329</sup> Conversely, Tom Carter had tried to be admitted to Menston Asylum a week before murdering his three children but after being examined was considered fit for work.<sup>330</sup> In the cases of Madden and Foote their previous incarceration formed part of their history of mental breakdown. For Carter, his unsuccessful attempt to be admitted to an asylum represented a failure of the medical officer to take his claims of insanity seriously. The *Daily Mail* pointed out that Menston Asylum's failure to believe that Carter was suffering with his mental health was 'an extraordinary feature of the tragedy'.<sup>331</sup> This implies that his actions in murdering his children, therefore, could have been prevented and he was not responsible for the crimes he committed.

Although Joel Eigen argues that in the accounts of medical witnesses 'delusion' far outnumbered all other terms invoked by medical witnesses between 1760 and 1913, in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample references to delusions were not reported to be the testimony of medical men suggesting that it was lay witnesses who provided this evidence.<sup>332</sup> Indeed, during the period 1900 to 1913 in only two cases did medical experts testifying at the Old Bailey about the sanity of the accused refer to a delusion. A delusion

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<sup>328</sup> 'Double Murder', *Daily Express* (6 August 1903), p. 5.

<sup>329</sup> 'Liverpool Child Murder', *Manchester Guardian* (12 October 1904), p. 12.

<sup>330</sup> 'A Father's Madness', *Manchester Guardian* (8 May 1905), p. 12.

<sup>331</sup> 'Triple Murder', *Daily Mail* (8 May 1908), p. 5.

<sup>332</sup> Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock*, p. 81.

provided something tangible on which insanity could be pinpointed so it does not come as a surprise that lay witnesses had knowledge of delusions and cited them in their testimony. It was reported that Frank Cavilla had delusions prior to murdering his wife and four children.<sup>333</sup> Cavilla had been out of work and it is apparent that his delusion was influenced by his economic position. He had a suspicion that people were preventing him from getting work and were conspiring to prevent him from 'getting on'.<sup>334</sup> He also claimed he had heard voices for some months, felt as if someone was striking his head with a hammer, and thought that some one was putting an electric battery on his head.<sup>335</sup> *The Times* reported that the idea of persecution was a very common form of delusion and the hearing of voices was also a common symptom of insanity.<sup>336</sup>

Suicide and suicide attempts were also mentioned in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers whose mental health was in question at the time they killed their child. In 44 of the cases (20 per cent) the offender committed suicide and in a further 28 (12 per cent) suicide was attempted. The fact that nearly 25 per cent either attempted to or succeeded in committing suicide suggests that there was a link between paternal child killing, suicide, and a breakdown in mental health. In 54 cases of suicide and attempted suicide (25 per cent) the defendant's mental health was mentioned in the newspaper articles. In most cases suicide and attempted suicide were seen as evidence of mental illness yet there were three cases in which the coroner returned a verdict of *felo de se*, an act committed whilst in a sane state of mind. The verdict was condemnatory and reflective of older pre-nineteenth century language used to describe self-murder.<sup>337</sup> A finding of

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<sup>333</sup> Although Cavilla was tried at the Old Bailey the transcript of his trial only recorded the verdict of the trial and no other details such as how the verdict was reached.

<sup>334</sup> 'Central Criminal Court', *The Times* (23 October 1902), p. 13.

<sup>335</sup> 'Husband Not Responsible', *Daily Mail* (5 September 1902), p. 3.

<sup>336</sup> 'Central Criminal Court', *The Times* (23 October 1902), p. 13.

<sup>337</sup> J. Miron, 'Suicide, Coroner's Inquests, and the Parameters of Compassion in Ontario, 1880-1900', *Social History*, 47 (2014), p. 592.

temporary insanity when suicide was committed was thought to be a less stigmatising and more sympathetic explanation but also served to undermine other motives.

As can be seen in Table 1.28, eight men who attempted to commit suicide after killing their children were found to be insane or not responsible for their actions, further emphasising the relationship between the act of suicide and how the individual's state of mind was perceived. In many cases of paternal child killing followed by suicide it was implied in the newspaper coverage that the father was driven to committing these crimes by insanity. Bereavement and grief also influenced some men to kill their children and then commit suicide. Other motives for paternal child killing followed by suicide centred on the father's financial difficulties, as is discussed further in the next sub-section of this chapter.

Verdict	Punishment	Number of Cases
Guilty of murder	Death, execution carried out	2
	Death, commuted to life imprisonment in a criminal lunatic asylum	1
	Death, reprieved	2
	Death, commuted to penal servitude for life	1
	Death, possible revision	1
	Death, outcome unknown	4
Guilty of murder, attempted murder, and attempted suicide but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure be known	1
Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure be known	6
Guilty of manslaughter	3 months imprisonment	1
Total		19

*Table 1.28: Verdicts and punishments of men who attempted suicide after killing their children, January 1900-July 1914*

### *Non-Physical Causes of Mental Illness*

The connection between unemployment, a breakdown in mental health, and criminal culpability was highlighted in the newspaper coverage of eighteen cases in this sub-sample. This has been explored in existing studies of paternal child killing. Jade Shepherd contends that the association of economic failure with personal failure in the nineteenth century



characterisation of masculinity was not just a bourgeois construct but a reality for many working class men.<sup>338</sup> In this sub-sample 144 of the men (64 per cent) were reported to be in employment at the time of the act, whilst 34 (15 per cent) were said to be unemployed. Evidently in this period paternal child killing was committed, largely, by employed men which somewhat contradicts the notion that this was an act of men who were anxious about their ability to provide.

The extent to which unemployment, financial worry, and the fear of poverty were credited as causes of mental illness by medical experts has been touched upon by Catherine Cox and Akihito Suzuki in their studies of nineteenth century asylums in Ireland and London respectively. Catherine Cox finds that medical practitioners acknowledged the disruptive impact that broader social and economic conditions had upon mental and emotional well-being.<sup>339</sup> Akihito Suzuki, however, argues that Victorian labouring men suffered from an intense fear of poverty and deep anxiety about their economic future but that such fears and anxieties were not given a prominent place in the writings of psychiatric authors.<sup>340</sup> The effects of unemployment and poverty on the individual's sanity were described in the newspaper coverage but it was not reported who made this connection or whether this connection was made in the courtroom or during an inquest. It was likely to have been invoked in court if the defence lawyers were aware that this factor was likely to sway a jury, although this was not recorded in the six Old Bailey trial transcripts in which the defendant's precarious financial position was used to explain their mental state. In two of these cases the medical expert referenced to the fact that unemployment had caused distress for the father. At the trial of Herbert Madden, the medical officer of Brixton Prison stated that Madden was 'worrying at being unable to get employment to support his children' but

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<sup>338</sup> Shepherd, 'One of the Best Fathers', p. 20.

<sup>339</sup> Cox, *Negotiating Insanity in the Southeast of Ireland*, p. 121.

<sup>340</sup> A. Suzuki, 'Lunacy and Labouring Men: Narratives of Male Vulnerability in Mid-Victorian London', in R. Bivins and J. Pickstone (eds.), *Medicine, Madness and Social History: Essays in Honour of Roy Porter* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2007), p. 118.

attributed Madden's crime to his excessive alcohol consumption rather than his fear of being unemployed.<sup>341</sup> However, at the trial of James Curry the medical superintendant at Shoreditch Infirmary claimed 'privation through want of work and means would be likely to affect him'.<sup>342</sup> He stated this was because Curry suffered from epilepsy and 'an epileptic would be more likely to be affected by worry than a man in an ordinary condition'.<sup>343</sup> The fear of destitution and poverty evidently drove some fathers to murder their children and the inclusion of their unemployed status was an attempt by the newspapers to offer an explanation for the crime and their state of mind.

In seven cases in which the defendant attempted to commit suicide his financial position and employment status was discussed in the newspaper coverage, cementing a link between mental health, employment prospects, and suicide. Ian Miller argues that when suicide was posited as a rational response to socio-economic circumstances, it facilitated a more sympathetic approach to such a death.<sup>344</sup> The strong association between unemployment and a breakdown in mental health can be seen in the way in which attention was drawn to the defendant's financial position even though medical experts did not attach any importance to this. Henry Popple attempted to commit suicide after murdering his three daughters. He was out of work, 'with no prospect of employment'.<sup>345</sup> William Jones tried to commit suicide after murdering his wife and four children. He had been out of work for nearly three years, owing to trade depression.<sup>346</sup> James Stezaker murdered his wife and child before attempting to commit suicide. The failure to obtain permanent work elsewhere

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<sup>341</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 14 June 2018), September 1903, trial of Herbert Madden (t19030908-647).

<sup>342</sup> *Old Bailey Proceedings Online* ([www.oldbaileyonline.org](http://www.oldbaileyonline.org), version 8.0, 14 June 2018), February 1904, trial of James Valentine Curry (t19040208-197).

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> I. Miller, 'Representations of Suicide in Urban North-West England c.1870-1910: The Formative Role of Respectability, Class, Gender, and Morality', *Mortality*, 15 (2010), p. 192.

<sup>345</sup> 'Two Children Murdered', *Daily Mail* (7 August 1905), p. 5.

<sup>346</sup> 'Wife and Family Murdered', *The Sunday Times* (26 June 1910), p. 15.

seems to have 'preyed upon his mind'.<sup>347</sup> The frequent use of this phrase suggests that newspapers in this period had their own particular lexicon with which to discuss and disseminate certain experiences of mental illness.

Lengthy periods of unemployment could gnaw away at a father's mental wellbeing. Charles Fox, who murdered his son, became exceedingly despondent at the continued fruitlessness of his endeavours to obtain employment having been suspended from the Post Office two years prior to the crime.<sup>348</sup> According to *The Observer* continued worry at his inability to find work had affected Fox's mind to the 'extent that it had become unhinged'.<sup>349</sup> Even short bouts of unemployment prompted extreme anxiety. George Nadin murdered three of his children and attacked two more. He had been in regular employment with the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company but the week prior to the crime he was unable to work due to ill health.<sup>350</sup> The inclusion of the paternal child killer's experience of unemployment, no matter how long, in newspaper articles highlights the centrality of the breadwinner in early twentieth century masculinity. It also demonstrates that newspaper journalists, editors, and, following this, readers, recognised the potentially harmful effects of unemployment on someone's, particularly a man's, sanity and suggests that the relationship between the two was well established among the public.

Grief was often cited as an explanation for a breakdown in mental health and for the murder of a child in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample. In the case of Gabriel Schumann, who killed his son and then himself, every article discussed his change in behaviour after the death of his wife. It was stated that he had been in a 'very morbid state', and that he had been very depressed and strange in his manner.<sup>351</sup> In a similar instance a man named Gorringe murdered his son and then killed himself. The 'only explanation' for the

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<sup>347</sup> 'A Weaver's Confession', *Manchester Guardian* (23 October 1912), p. 3.

<sup>348</sup> 'Child Murder', *The Sunday Times* (26 April 1908), p. 11.

<sup>349</sup> 'Child Murderer in Fulham', *The Observer* (26 April 1908), p. 8.

<sup>350</sup> 'Week's Holocaust of Crime', *The Sunday Times* (22 November 1908), p. 7.

<sup>351</sup> 'Father and Son Found Dead at Willesden', *The Times* (29 October 1913), p. 4.

crime was that he had so mourned the loss of his wife, who died two months prior to this case.<sup>352</sup> Evidence was given by a neighbour at Gorrige's inquest that 'he could not live without his wife' but it was the newspaper journalist that cemented the link between his suicide and his state of mind.<sup>353</sup> In both of these cases the father's actions were unequivocally linked to his grief and it was highlighted as a genuine cause of insanity.

In a number of cases of paternal child killing the consumption of alcohol prior to the crime was linked with a form of mental illness and in three cases this helped to produce a finding of guilty but insane. Although there was a wider unwillingness to excuse drunkenness and to use it to limit responsibility for murder from the mid-nineteenth century, this was not uniform.<sup>354</sup> Denis O'Hara's murder of his daughter was excused by the *Manchester Guardian* as the 'terrible result of drunken mania'.<sup>355</sup> Before murdering the child a neighbour noted that 'he was under the influence of drink' and it is evident from other witness testimony that he had been drinking heavily for a fortnight prior to the crime.<sup>356</sup> For the defence it was proposed that O'Hara was of unsound mind at the time of the crime due to an attack of acute mania. When the medical expert testifying at his trial learnt that the defendant had been drinking heavily he stated that this had 'culminated in an attack of delirious mania', an opinion confirmed by a second medical expert called by the defence.<sup>357</sup> That both the legal and medical professionals named O'Hara's condition as a form of mania, suggests that they were unwilling to fully ascribe his crimes and his mental illness to alcohol. It was the journalists of the articles that cemented the connection between the two through sub-headlines such as 'Atrocious Murder by a Father, Terrible Result of Drunken Mania' and

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<sup>352</sup> 'Tragedy of Sorrow', *Daily Express* (22 September 1902), p. 5.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>354</sup> Wiener, *Men of Blood*, p. 259.

<sup>355</sup> 'Manchester Summer Assizes', *Manchester Guardian* (18 July 1900), p. 3.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

by focussing on the testimony of lay witnesses who stated that he was 'under the influence of drink' at the time of the crime.<sup>358</sup>

In another case, Herbert Madden killed two of his children and on his arrest it was stated that that he 'appeared to be perfectly calm, without the slightest indication of intoxication'.<sup>359</sup> Indeed when questioned by the prison doctor he claimed to be 'perfectly sane and perfectly sober'.<sup>360</sup> During his trial, however, medical evidence given for the defence posited that the prisoner's mind at the time of the crime was 'confused through excessive drinking'.<sup>361</sup> Madden's wife also drew a connection between her husband's excessive alcohol consumption and the murder of his children stating that she thought her husband had 'delirium tremens', a disease brought on when prolonged drunkenness is suddenly stopped.<sup>362</sup> The phrase 'delirium tremens' might be more expected from a medical witness, which illustrates the public's receptiveness to certain medical terms. From these examples it is evident that it was not only medical experts in psychiatry who believed that there was a connection between excessive alcohol consumption but those with no formal psychiatric knowledge.

The connection between excessive alcohol consumption and insanity was not always viewed sympathetically, underlining the conflicting opinions about the excessive consumption of alcohol. Adolph Dumpig murdered his child on New Year's Eve. He was described as a good husband and a good father 'except when in drink'.<sup>363</sup> On the day in question he came home in an 'intoxicated condition' and continued to drink rum which

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<sup>358</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>359</sup> 'Supposed Murder at King's-Cross', *The Times* (6 August 1903), p. 4.

<sup>360</sup> 'Two Children Murdered', *Daily Mail* (6 August 1903), p. 5.

<sup>361</sup> 'Central Criminal Court', *The Times* (10 September 1903), p. 2.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2. It can be inferred from the trial transcript from the Old Bailey that although Madden's wife gave this testimony in court she was cross-examined as to how and why she thought her husband was suffering from delirium tremens. She admitted that her husband had not been diagnosed by a doctor as suffering from delirium tremens and that she herself had no experience of the condition apart from her husband.

<sup>363</sup> 'Murder of a Child in London', *Manchester Guardian* (2 January 1904), p. 7.

‘appeared to madden him’.<sup>364</sup> He then attacked his wife and his child whilst ‘possessed by a drunken frenzy’.<sup>365</sup> Dumpig’s lawyer contended that he was ‘irresponsible’ since he was drunk at the time of the crime. The Judge, however, asserted that it would be ‘extremely dangerous to excuse a person like the prisoner merely on the ground of drunkenness’.<sup>366</sup>

Dumpig’s case does not differ much from that of Madden or O’Hara, apart from his nationality and the Judge presiding at his trial, but his actions were unequivocally connected to his consumption of alcohol, unlike the vague phrasing of ‘mania’ used to discuss O’Hara and Madden’s condition. That Dumpig was German may have had some bearing on the outcome of the case and his heritage was stressed several times in the newspaper coverage. In the early twentieth century immigrants were consistently portrayed as a source of crime and a cause of social tension.<sup>367</sup> However, the decision to find him ‘guilty’ rather than ‘guilty but insane’ may have stemmed from the Judge’s understanding of the effects of alcohol on an individual’s responsibility. Despite several attestations of Dumpig’s frenzied behaviour after drinking alcohol, the Judge did not deem this to be sufficient to excuse his behaviour due to alcohol-induced insanity.

The final non-physical cause to consider is the impact of army service on the mental health of paternal child killers. In just under 10 per cent of cases the individual was reported to have served in the army or to be employed by the army at the time of the alleged crime. If a man’s experiences in war was the main factor reported to be behind his crime, especially if mental illness was invoked. This calls into question the notion that the First World War was the first war to cause such profound mental suffering among those who fought in it. Suzie Grogan observes that it is possible that the first recorded diagnosis of something akin to shell shock was made in the Russo-Japanese War which took place between 1904 and

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<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>365</sup> ‘Murder Interpreter’, *Daily Express* (14 January 1904), p. 5.

<sup>366</sup> ‘Drink and Crime’, *Manchester Guardian* (14 January 1904), p. 11.

<sup>367</sup> C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England* (Pearson Education Limited: Harlow, 2011), p. 6.

1905.<sup>368</sup> The effects of wars preceding the First World War has also been explored by Effie Karageorgos who has found evidence of mental strain in Australian soldiers who fought in the Boer War, although diagnosis was often not connected with combat itself.<sup>369</sup> During the period 1900 to July 1914 the main war referenced was the Boer War and in some cases army service was still being referred to more than a decade after the end of the conflict. Henry Higginbottom suffered from sunstroke while serving in South Africa and the medical expert at his trial claimed that Higginbottom might have committed the deed in a 'sudden frenzy due to sunstroke'.<sup>370</sup> Samuel Atherley had seen military service in India and South Africa, and was invalided home on account of enteric fever.<sup>371</sup> Herbert Madden had also been in the army and had been for some years in India, where he suffered from malaria.<sup>372</sup> Because so many patients were referred from India and tropical postings, climate was identified as a common cause of insanity.<sup>373</sup> As Karageorgos finds in her sample of soldiers, paternal child killers who had fought in the Boer War were diagnosed with a physical illness yet their army service was used in the newspapers to provide evidence on their state of mind prior to killing their children.

Although the connection between army service and mental illness was made implicitly in the newspaper coverage, that it was mentioned at all implies that there was a wider understanding of the negative effects of army service on mental health. The connection was made implicitly and with a focus on bodily rather than psychological symptoms because, as has already been discussed, physical symptoms of mental illness were more acceptable. Karageorgos argues that the limited understandings of the psychological

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<sup>368</sup> S. Grogan, *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War's Legacy for Britain's Mental Health* (Pen and Sword History: Barnsley, 2014), p. 17.

<sup>369</sup> See E. Karageorgos, *Australian Soldiers in South Africa and Vietnam: Words From the Battlefield* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2016), p. 97 and p. 142.

<sup>370</sup> 'Triple Murder Charge', *Daily Mail* (4 May 1910), p. 6.

<sup>371</sup> 'The Assizes', *The Times* (13 November 1909), p. 4.

<sup>372</sup> 'Central Criminal Court', *The Times* (10 September 1903), p. 2.

<sup>373</sup> E. Jones and S. Wessely, 'War Syndromes: The Impact of Culture on Medically Unexplained Symptoms', *Medical History*, 49 (2005), p. 65.

effects of warfare and the infancy of military psychiatry made it impossible to recognise and correctly diagnose such trauma.<sup>374</sup> Karageorgos also contends that recognition that there was a connection between a psychological condition and military service was unlikely because the dominant ideas surrounding war in the early twentieth century stressed honour, loyalty and courage.<sup>375</sup> Any sign of weakness could have been interpreted as cowardice. However, by the time the ex-soldiers in the sub-sample used for this chapter were charged with killing their children the Boer War had been over for several years. While these men could still be seen as 'unmanly' for continuing to be effected by their war experiences, illness due to army service was understood, at even a basic level, as a one of a number of mitigating factors that could explain why they killed their children. Additionally because there was no official lexicon with which to talk about mental breakdown after army service, focus on physical symptoms offered a way of discussing negative implications. As previously stated, physical symptoms were tangible evidence of an illness for a lay witness. The inclusion of army service in the newspaper coverage, especially when it had resulted in an illness, formed part of the back catalogue of details used to shine light on a defendant's mental health prior to the crime.

### **Conclusions to Chapter Three**

In this chapter the newspaper coverage of a sub-sample of cases of paternal child killing was used as a window through which to see how one type of crime was packaged for public consumption. Representations of paternal child killers in this sub-sample varied throughout the period and there was no stereotypical case of paternal child killing, although there were certain similarities between the cases, such as unemployment, grief, army service, and forms of mental illness the paternal child killers suffered from. From reading the newspaper

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<sup>374</sup> Karageorgos, *Australian Soldiers in South Africa and Vietnam*, p. 97.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.



coverage of 223 cases of paternal child killing it is clear that different combinations of factors motivated men to kill their children and these factors also influenced how their case would be received by the national press.

This chapter has shown that understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were characterised by flexibility. There was no uniform response to a case and the behaviour of a paternal child killer believed to be insane. It is also apparent that explanations of mental illness were chosen by the newspapers according to what was thought to be most exciting cause and, therefore, could engage the reader's attention. As was shown by the trial transcripts of cases that went to the Old Bailey, newspaper journalists selected material they thought were interesting whereas other pieces of testimony were not included at all. Evidently the very mention of the accused's questionable sanity suggested to the reader that this case of paternal child killing was the result of mental illness. In some cases mental illness was talked about as part of a checklist of key topics to be brought up in a case of alleged murder. It was part of the defendant's biography, much like reference to army service, employment status or character.

In order to make mental illness and criminal culpability an understandable topic for their readers, newspapers relied on lay interpretations of mental health. Medical testimony represented a blend of medical and lay terminology and understandings, with a tendency to favour lay understandings reflecting the type of reader and the level of knowledge they were likely to have of the complex issue of insanity and responsibility. The language used by medical experts had to be easy to digest since it was aimed at a jury made up of non-specialists. Although psychiatric medicine was a relatively established field in the early twentieth century and medical experts testifying on insanity had long been a feature of criminal trials, there was still an air of uncertainty surrounding the legitimacy of accounts of an individual's state of mind at the time a crime was committed. Legal understandings and medical testimony mediated through more simplistic language allowed this gap to be

bridged. The wide variety of terms used to describe and discuss mental illness led to inconsistencies in definitions and reflects the diversity of understandings. Journalists tended to use out-of-date medical understandings and avoided complex medical terminology when discussing the mental health of paternal child killers. However, it is also evident that some older theories still resonated with medical experts and lay and legal audiences.

This chapter has also highlighted that there were a number of continuities with the late nineteenth century concerning the legal treatment of paternal child killers and approaches to mental illness and criminal culpability. As Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson contend, fathers who killed their children did not face the law at its most severe and were often found 'guilty but insane', much like women who killed their own children. However, unlike Shepherd and Wilson, findings of insanity did not always depend upon the employment status of paternal child killers, indeed many fathers were employed at the time they killed their children and were found insane. Some of the causes of mental illness revealed in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample, such as heredity, grief and poverty, are continuous with those discussed by both Shepherd and Wilson, highlighting the durability of some of these understandings. It also demonstrates which theories of insanity worked in attaining a finding of 'guilty but insane' in court.

## **Chapter Four: “Dreaded the Army”: The Impact of the First World War on Representations of Paternal Child Killing in the English Press, August 1914 to November 1918**

This chapter explores the way in which a sub-sample of cases of paternal child killing were reported in a selection of English national newspapers during the First World War (July 28<sup>th</sup> 1914 to November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918). The sub-sample totals seventeen paternal child killers and twenty-two victims. Although this is a small number of cases to examine as a separate sub-sample, the very nature of its size indicates a number of things about paternal child killing during this four year period. In the previous chapter there was an average of 60 cases reported in a four-year period, over three times as many as in this sub-sample. From this it can be inferred that paternal child killing was either not as prevalent or more likely was less commonly reported on in newspapers during the First World War. The First World War has not been explored by other historians who have studied paternal child killing so the conclusions drawn in this chapter are new findings.

This chapter argues that the First World War had an effect on the way in which cases of paternal child killing were reported on in newspapers and the way in which paternal child killers were punished. During the period 1914 to 1918, the sub-sample of cases of paternal child killing received consistently low newspaper coverage in terms of the length and number of articles. In addition to there being fewer cases in this sub-sample, the newspaper coverage was much briefer than for cases discussed in the previous chapter. The reasons for the lack of newspaper coverage of this sub-sample are explored throughout this chapter. Additionally, the men in this sub-sample received harsher punishments than cases in the previous sub-sample. Although there were variables in the biography of paternal child killers, variety did not characterise the cases and the coverage they received to the same extent as the first sub-sample.

In their 200-year history of crime news in the media, Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson, and Samantha Pegg do not pay much attention to the years of the First World War, possibly because of the reduced coverage of crimes. Their explanation for the virtual disappearance of reports of everyday crime was because the newspapers were heavily censored but they do not expand on this point.<sup>376</sup> This chapter develops Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg's findings by examining the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing, a violent rather than everyday crime. The increasing scale of the involvement of virtually the whole population in the war meant that newspapers had little impetus to focus on anything but war-related news.<sup>377</sup> It made commercial sense to focus on war-related news as that was what people wanted to read about.<sup>378</sup> Additionally, petty criminality was seen to be an uninteresting, as well as unsuitable, news item during a time of war and it was considered important to domestic morale to keep coverage of any war-related criminal activity to a minimum to avoid depressing newspaper readers.<sup>379</sup> This chapter demonstrates that it was not only petty criminality that got swept aside in favour of war news but that newspapers devoted less space to even the very serious crimes during the years of the First World War.

Paternal child killing during the First World War has not been explored by previous historians, possibly due to lack of access to transcripts of criminal trials. This chapter, therefore, continues on from Alesha Lister's study, in which she examines representations of paternal child killers from the end of the nineteenth century to 1913.<sup>380</sup> Lister contends that men who killed their children were not uniformly characterised as unkind or abusive fathers by family members, their community, the press or the court. This is also reflected in the

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<sup>376</sup> J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson and S. Pegg, *Crime News and Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2013), p. 133.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>380</sup> A. Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London, 1889-1913' (Unpublished PhD: Monash University, 2017), p. 7.

newspaper representations of cases in this sub-sample. Some fathers received sympathy for their actions whilst others were somewhat denigrated by the press. However, the range of depictions from understanding to incredulous is not as obvious because the articles were so much shorter, which prevents in-depth characterisation of paternal child killers. Crime historians tend to focus on the impact the war had on everyday crime and fears that ‘brutalised’ soldiers would cause a spike in crime figures.<sup>381</sup> Violent crime committed during the war has not been addressed.

The analysis is split into five sections focussing on different aspects of the material found in newspaper articles. What these details consisted of and revealed are explored throughout the chapter. The first section examines the biographical details of the paternal child killers and their victims. This is followed by an exploration of the legal process, including charges, convictions and punishments of paternal child killers. Section three explores the nature of the newspaper reporting on individual cases and the sub-sample as a whole. In section four the editorial devices employed by newspapers are examined. Finally, the way in which understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were portrayed in the newspaper coverage is examined.

## **1. Overview of the Sub-sample**

In this section the biographical details of paternal child killers and their victims are analysed to demonstrate the range of individual circumstances of the alleged perpetrators in the sub-sample. The geographic spread and nationality of men in the sub-sample is examined, as well as marital status, occupation, and type of housing in which the accused paternal child

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<sup>381</sup> See B. Godfrey, *Crime in England, 1880-1945: The Rough and The Criminal, The Policed and The Incarcerated* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2014), H. Shore, ‘Criminality and Englishness in the Aftermath: The Racecourse wars of the 1920s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011), pp. 474-497, C. Emsley, ‘A Legacy of Conflict? The ‘Brutalised Veteran’ and Violence in Europe after the Great War’, in E. Avdela, S. D’Cruze, and J. Rowbotham (eds.), *Problems of Crime and Violence in Europe, 1780-2000: Essays in Criminal Justice* (The Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, 2010), pp. 43-64, and C. Emsley, ‘Violent Crime in England in 1919: Post-War Anxieties and Press Narratives’, *Continuity and Change*, 23 (2008), pp. 173-195.

killer lived. The relationship the paternal child killer had with his wife and partner, and his behaviour after killing the child and in court is also considered. The number, age, and gender of the child victims, in addition to their legitimacy, are examined, and whether there were any other victims in the case.

#### *Geographical Spread and Nationality of Paternal Child Killers*

All of the cases of paternal child killing in this sub-sample were committed in the United Kingdom and Ireland. There were, however, two instances in which the perpetrator was stated to be of a different nationality in the newspaper coverage (see Table 2.1). There were two cases reported to have occurred in London whilst another six were reported to have occurred in other cities, such as Edinburgh, Birmingham and Newcastle, and a further six cases were committed in villages and towns. This suggests that, unlike the first sub-sample, there was no marked attempt by journalists to associate paternal child killing with urban and metropolitan areas. It also demonstrates the widespread nature of this act and that it was not confined to one type of environment or locale.

Nationality	Number of Cases
English	10
Irish	2
Scottish	2
Swiss	1
Welsh	1
South African	1
Total	17

*Table 2.1: Nationality of paternal child killers, August 1914-November 1918*

#### *Marital Status of Paternal Child Killers*

Out of the seventeen reported instances of paternal child killing nine of the men were married at the time of the crime and one man lived with another woman. Since information was not available for the relationship status of the remaining seven paternal child killers in the sub-sample, it cannot be so strongly argued, as it was in the first sub-sample, that paternal child killing in this period was mainly the act of a married man. However, that over

half of the men in the sub-sample were married highlights the continued correlation between marital status and paternal child killing. Married men were more likely to kill their children because they wanted to protect them from ill health, economic deprivation, or the perceived shame of failing to fulfil their paternal duties of protection and provision.

#### *Employment Status and Occupation of Paternal Child Killers*

In this sub-sample six of the men were stated to be in employment whilst two were unemployed, a finding consistent with the first sub-sample. In the remaining nine cases it was not clear in the newspaper coverage whether or not the man was in employment at the time of the crime, although some form of occupation or trade was referred to. A variety of occupations were reported in this sub-sample ranging from working class occupations, such as a miner and a farmer, to middle and lower-middle class professions, such as a manager, and a chemist. Such a variety of occupations and, therefore, classes of men in this sub-sample indicates that paternal child killing was committed across the social spectrum and not restricted to one social class. It also shows that newspapers did not overtly focus on instances of paternal child killing committed by working class fathers.

#### *Army Record of Paternal Child Killers*

Although this sub-sample specifically corresponds with the First World War only three men (17 per cent) were reported to be in the army which crudely suggests that during the conflict newspapers were not willing to report on soldiers who killed their children. Prior to the First World War the British army had just under a quarter of a million soldiers but by 1918 the British army had over 4,000,000 soldiers making the likelihood that only three soldiers killed their children questionable. Newspapers may have been less likely to report on crimes

committed by soldiers in case it affected morale and gave a bad impression of British soldiers, who were mainly portrayed as heroes protecting the liberty of British citizens.<sup>382</sup>

#### *Relationship of Paternal Child Killer with Partner and Children*

A variety of relationships between men and their children and partners were described in the newspaper coverage ranging from detached to affectionate. George Anderson cut his step-daughter's throat following a quarrel after which he was said to have walked to a public house in the 'most callous manner'.<sup>383</sup> Although he claimed it was an accident Anderson later said that his step-daughter had been 'aggravating [him] for some time'.<sup>384</sup> In comparison, William Juta, who murdered his wife, child, and mother-in-law, was reported to have lived 'on most affectionate terms' with his family.<sup>385</sup> As with the previous sub-sample, some fathers killed their children out of alleged excess affection and love for their children. In one article on the case of William Simpson it was reported that it was 'his love for [his] suffering child' that led him to cut his throat.<sup>386</sup> Similarly, Thomas Weedon, described his son as his 'darling boy' and said that he killed him so that he wouldn't have to 'suffer the same miseries' as he had.<sup>387</sup> The picture gained from the newspaper coverage of these cases is not one of hateful fathers but rather the opposite. As Alesha Lister argues, men convicted of child murder were most commonly characterised as 'sad', 'tragic' or 'desperate' figures rather than simply as bad men.<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> A. Bingham and M. Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to the Present* (Peter Lang: Oxford, 2015), p. 24.

<sup>383</sup> 'Court of Criminal Appeal', *The Times* (8 December 1914), p. 3.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>385</sup> 'Triple Murder in Edinburgh', *The Observer* (19 September 1915), p. 11.

<sup>386</sup> 'Shall Private Simpson Die?', *Daily Express* (14 July 1915), p. 5.

<sup>387</sup> 'Dreaded the Army', *Daily Mirror* (14 February 1917), p. 2.

<sup>388</sup> Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London', p. 167.



### *Number, Gender and Age of Child Victim(s)*

In fourteen cases one child victim was killed, in two instances there were two victims, and in one case there were four victims. Unfortunately, there was not enough information provided in the newspaper coverage about the number of children in the perpetrator's family to make a judgement as to the number of children a father was likely to kill. Nearly all of the child victims were aged between one and ten years old. Much like the previous sub-sample this was the most prevalent age group. Imprecise descriptions of the child victims' age, such as 'baby', 'infant', and 'grown man', were used in the newspaper coverage in place of the actual age of the child, highlighting one of the drawbacks of using newspapers as the main primary source to obtain biographical information. Of the cases in which the gender of the child victims was detailed in the newspaper coverage there were ten female victims and nine male victims, including cases in which both male and female children were killed. In a third of cases the father also killed, or in one case attempted to kill, his wife, a higher proportion than in the first sub-sample. In two cases the father tried to kill another of his children and in one case the perpetrator tried to kill his mother-in-law. Due to the brevity of the newspaper articles it is not clear why more paternal child killers also killed their wife.

### *Legitimacy of the Child Victim(s)*

In 70 per cent of cases in this sub-sample the father killed their legitimate child (see Table 2.2). Although it was argued in the previous chapter that fathers were more likely to kill their legitimate children in order to protect them, the same cannot be said about this sub-sample. Because the average length of articles about cases in this sub-sample was much shorter, there was not enough room to go into detail about why the father in question decided to kill his children. Whilst there were two cases in which the father reportedly killed his children out of self-proclaimed love, there were also two cases in which the motive seemed much more sinister. William Hodgson murdered his wife and child because he was having an affair

with another woman who had recently given birth to his child.<sup>389</sup> Similarly, Richard Luck murdered his daughter because he was having an affair with the wife of a soldier and the couple did not want their affair to be discovered.<sup>390</sup> The couple decided to commit suicide and murder their daughter. Luck survived and was portrayed as a coward for being unable to ‘face the music’.<sup>391</sup> Neither of the men were particularly castigated in the press for murdering their children in order to keep their illicit affairs a secret. The moral code which governed and criticised the behaviour of women who committed similar acts did not apply to these men.<sup>392</sup>

Relationship to Offender	Number of Cases
Legitimate child	12
Illegitimate child	2
Stepchild	2
Not his child	1
Total	17

Table 2.2: *The relationship between victims and offenders, August 1914-November 1918*

## 2. The Legal Process

In this section of the analysis only the twelve cases from England and Wales are examined since the legal system of England and Wales differed to that in Ireland and Scotland. As the information for the cases in the sub-sample is collected from newspapers there is not enough data to discuss concrete trends in verdicts and punishments but the material can help to elucidate more general themes in the legal outcomes of English and Welsh paternal child killers during the period 1914 to 1918.

### *Charges, Verdicts, and Punishments*

In this sub-sample, paternal child killers received harsher punishment than those in the first sub-sample, suggesting that the punishment of violent crime was more severe during the

<sup>389</sup> ‘Liscard Murder Trial’, *Manchester Guardian* (13 July 1917), p. 6.

<sup>390</sup> ‘“Could Not Face Music”’, *Daily Mirror* (30 July 1918), p. 2.

<sup>391</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>392</sup> See C. Rattigan, *“What Else Could I Do?” Single Mothers and Infanticide, Ireland 1900-1950* (Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2012).

First World War. From the information available the most common charge was that of murder with eight of the seventeen accused men (47 per cent) being charged with and found guilty of this crime. There was also one case in which the father was charged with murder and attempted suicide but only found guilty of murder. What is surprising about these findings is that none of the perpetrators were found 'guilty but insane', despite the prevalence of the verdict in the previous sub-sample. It is difficult to determine why there was a lack of insanity pleas in this period, especially when earlier in 1914 there were two cases in which the father was found 'guilty of murder but insane'. Perhaps mental illness, already somewhat a contentious issue prior to the First World War, was made more controversial due to the vast numbers of men mentally wounded by the effects of the war.<sup>393</sup> Joanna Bourke estimates that neurasthenia was responsible for one third of all discharges from the army during the First World War and that by the end of the war 80,000 men had been diagnosed with war neuroses.<sup>394</sup> Of the men found guilty of murder, all eight were sentenced to death. Four of these men were recommended to mercy, and three had their sentences reprieved. That all of the men were sentenced to death suggests that the punishment of murder, particularly child murder, was harsher than during the previous period in which only 10 per cent of paternal child killers were reported to have been sentenced to death for the murder of their children. A recommendation to mercy in this sub-sample may have been in lieu of a finding of insanity since the mental health of each man was referenced in the newspaper coverage of the case.

Unfortunately the judicial statistics collected by the Home Office are incomplete for the period examined in this chapter because of the disruption caused by the First World War. From the data that was collected for the years 1914, 1917 and 1918 there were 60 people sentenced to death for murder, 32 people found guilty but insane, and a further 21

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<sup>393</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books Limited: London, 1996), p. 109.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

found insane on arraignment prior to the trial.<sup>395</sup> Findings of insanity in murder trials (both guilty but insane and insane on arraignment) diminished slightly from an average of twenty per year in the period 1900 to 1913 to seventeen per year in the period 1914 to 1918.<sup>396</sup> It is difficult to determine why there were no findings of insanity in this sub-sample of paternal child killers. It seems unlikely that insanity was not invoked as a defence in any of the cases given the nature of paternal child killing. One reason why there might have been less findings of insanity and harsher verdicts was because members of the criminal justice system did not want to appear lenient in their attitude towards violent crime during the First World War. Consequently, those accused of serious and violent crimes, such as paternal child killers, received harsh punishments.

#### *Indictments with Partners*

In only one case was the father indicted with his partner, in comparison to 25 per cent of cases in the previous sub-sample. Both Walter Gibbins and Edith Proctor were found guilty of the murder of Gibbins' seven-year-old daughter, who they allowed to starve to death. The father was sentenced to death but Proctor's sentence was reprieved due to her 'condition', from which it can be assumed that she was pregnant. The couple lived together as man and wife, despite Proctor being married to someone else, and had ten children between them. During their trial it was detailed by an unaccredited source that Proctor took a 'dislike' to Gibbins' children, particularly the victim, who was given very little food, despite Gibbins earning 'good wages'.<sup>397</sup> Because the couple lived together as man and wife it was thought to be Proctor's 'duty' to ensure that the child was properly fed, therefore, the judge was of the opinion that the evidence against Gibbins was less than that against Proctor.<sup>398</sup> Further,

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<sup>395</sup> Judicial Statistics, England and Wales, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online [accessed November 2017].

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> 'Child Starved to Death', *Daily Mail* (19 March 1918), p. 4.

<sup>398</sup> 'Court of Criminal Appeal', *The Times* (23 April 1918), p. 2.

it was stated that Gibbins was 'so infatuated' with Proctor and 'so afraid of offending her' that he would rather see his child starve to death than subject himself to any 'violence or unpleasantness'.<sup>399</sup> The accountability of the mother, or in this case the stepmother, was greater than that of the father despite the fact that Gibbins was the child's legitimate parent. It is evident from this case that responsibility for a child's welfare lay with the maternal figure of the family, no matter if she was the child's legitimate mother or not. It is also evident that *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* further maligned Proctor by portraying her as a seductress to whom Gibbins was enthralled and powerless to control. However, Proctor did not go to the gallows despite the castigation she faced by the press. Evidently her pregnancy saved her from harsher punishment.

### **3. Nature of Press Coverage**

This part of the chapter uses the 53 articles pertaining to cases in the sub-sample to examine the extent of newspaper coverage. This is done by looking at the number of newspapers which reported on each case, the number of articles printed per case, the length of articles, and the number of articles printed at each stage of the legal process. This section builds on work done by Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg, whose work examines how and why different newspapers selected, constructed and presented a particular crime's reportage for popular consumption.<sup>400</sup> In their studies of newspaper representations of paternal child killers, neither Cathryn Wilson nor Alesha Lister consider the extent of reporting on each case of paternal child killing. However, by examining how much space was given to cases of paternal child killing a clearer picture of how cases of paternal child killing were represented is gained.

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>400</sup> Rowbotham, Stevenson and Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain*, p. 9.

### *Extent of Reporting on Individual Cases*

In this sub-sample there were no cases in which all seven newspapers reported on a case of paternal child killing. It was more likely that up to four newspapers reported on the case (see Table 2.3). Unlike the previous sub-sample none of the cases in the period 1914 to 1918 attained sensational levels of newspaper coverage with the most number of articles on any one case totalling seven (see Table 2.4). The number of lines per article rarely exceeded 39, contrary to the previous sub-sample in which some newspaper articles regularly exceeded 149 lines (see Table 2.5 and Table 2.6). Even when the cases were reported on it was not in as much detail as those in the previous sub-sample, highlighting that even crimes of a more serious nature were not thought to be pertinent enough to be reported on in-depth during wartime.

Number of Newspapers	Number of Cases
1	6
2	4
3	2
4	4
5	0
6	1
Total Number of Cases	17

*Table 2.3: The number of newspapers which reported on each case, August 1914-November 1918*

Number of Articles	Number of Cases
1	5
2	2
3	2
4	3
5	1
6	1
7	2
Total Number of Cases	17

*Table 2.4: The number of articles found per case, August 1914-November 1918*

Lines of Text	Number of Articles
Fewer than 10	8
10-19	16
20-29	13
30-39	6
40-49	2
50-59	0
60-69	2
70-79	1
80-89	2
90-99	1

Table 2.5: The number of lines per article, August 1914-November 1918

Total Number of Article Lines	Number of Cases
Fewer than 10	2
10-19	3
20-29	1
30-39	1
40-49	1
50-59	1
60-69	2
70-79	1
80-89	1
90-99	1
150-199	1
200-249	1
300-349	1
Total Number of Cases	17

Table 2.6: The total number of lines per case, August 1914-November 1918

### *Extent of Reporting by Newspaper*

Not every newspaper reported on each case in the sub-sample, a finding shared with the previous sub-sample. *The Times* followed by the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Daily Express* reported on the highest number of cases during the period 1914 to 1918 (see Tables 2.8 and 2.9). Four out of the seven newspapers did not report on a case more than once. Given that *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times* were weekly rather than daily papers, their paucity of coverage is understandable. However, the lack of coverage from the other five papers needs explaining. Due to the volume of news relating to the First World War and the demoralising nature of crime news, newspaper editors may have chosen not to give extensive attention to cases of paternal child killing. Paternal child killing was a morbid subject unlikely to boost

morale. The newspaper coverage was also analysed according to the stage in the legal process the articles appeared (see Table 2.7). There was a fairly even coverage of each stage in the reporting process aside from the ‘police court hearing’, suggesting that the discovery of the killing and the verdict were the most engaging stages in the legal process and, crucially, that they provided the most information for journalists to make a story out of.

Newspaper	Number of Cases
<i>Daily Express</i>	5
<i>Daily Mail</i>	7
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	4
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	6
<i>The Observer</i>	3
<i>The Times</i>	13
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	4

*Table 2.7: The number of cases reported on by each newspaper, August 1914-November 1918*

Newspaper	Number of Articles
<i>Daily Express</i>	10
<i>Daily Mail</i>	9
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	4
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	11
<i>The Observer</i>	3
<i>The Times</i>	13
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	4

*Table 2.8: The total number of articles published by each newspaper, August 1914-November 1918*

Stages in Reporting	Number of Articles
Discovery of the killing	11
Coroner’s inquest	8
Police court hearing	3
Trial in progress	8
Trial verdict	11
After the verdict	11

*Table 2.9: The amount of newspaper coverage per stage in the reporting process, August 1914-November 1918*

#### 4. Editorial Devices

This section examines some of the editorial devices employed by newspaper editors and journalists to construct the articles and the narratives about the crimes being reported. Such devices employed by the newspapers include the headlines and sub-headlines of the articles, elements of the crime, such as graphic details of wounds sustained, sensationalism



and public reaction, and photographs. By considering these mechanisms it is determined how cases of paternal child killing were reported on in newspapers during this period more generally as well as their intended impact.

### *Headlines and Sub-headlines*

Most articles relating to cases in this sub-sample used a headline, nearly half of which also used a sub-headline for further information pertaining to the crime (see Table 2.10).

Although the newspaper articles about paternal child killing in this sub-sample were shorter, it was rare for the article to be subsumed under a more general headline. As can be seen in Table 2.11, the most common feature of the headline was the crime that had been committed followed by the identity of the victim(s), the occupation of the accused, and the location of the crime. The headlines and sub-headlines were largely informative and very few employed sensational language to describe the crimes. The main focus of the headlines was to convey that an instance of paternal child killing had occurred rather than to provoke outrage or cause concern. The decision to convey the facts of the case rather than use dramatic language may have been due to that fact that these crimes had been committed in the midst of the First World War. Newspapers chose headlines that were less controversial at a time when there was so much commotion and brutality already occurring in the wider world. This is also argued by Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy who find that the popular press during wartime tried to unite the national community around a patriotic vision of resolution, togetherness and virtue while also offering unflagging support for the bravery and gallantry of the troops on the frontline.<sup>401</sup>

Unlike the previous sub-sample, the mental health of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample was not mentioned in the headlines and sub-headlines of any of the articles. Given that none of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample were found guilty but insane

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<sup>401</sup> Bingham and Conboy, *Tabloid Century*, p. 24.

at trial this does not seem surprising. However, the mental health of five men in this sub-sample (30 per cent of cases) was discussed in the newspaper coverage highlighting that there was some interest in the interplay between mental illness and criminal culpability. As argued in section five of this chapter, journalists may have shied away from in-depth discussions of the mental health of men accused of paternal child killing because of the controversy surrounding mental illness during the First World War. Additionally because the average length of newspaper articles on paternal child killing was shorter in this period, there was less space to discuss mental health over other elements of the case being reported on.

Type of Headline	Number of Articles
Specific headline	42
Sub-headline of specific headline	25
General headline	6
Sub-headline of general headline	6
Sub-headline only	2
No headline	3

*Table 2.10: The breakdown of headlines of each article, August 1914-November 1918*

Headline Feature	Number of Headlines
Location of the crime	13
Occupation of accused	14
Crime committed	31
Victim(s)	17
Relationship of accused to victim(s)	10
Punishment	8
Insanity	0
Means of killing	5
Emotive descriptions	9

*Table 2.11: The most common features of headlines and sub-headlines, August 1914-November 1918*

### *Elements of the Killing*

In this sub-sample the most prevalent method of killing was the use of violence, including drowning, shooting, and cutting the child's throat, a finding consistent with the previous sub-sample. Only one child died from an indirect form of killing, that of starvation. However, the press handled cases differently in the war years and there was not the reader appetite for wounds of children who had been killed by their fathers. In contrast with the previous

sub-sample the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing committed during the First World War rarely described brutal, gory, or shocking elements of victims' bodies, wounds, and blood loss. Joanna Bourke argues that the First World War stimulated concern with the sanitising of death, encouraging the spread of new hygienic procedures and popularising the metaphor of purification.<sup>402</sup> Her idea also applies to the metaphorical sanitisation of death in public spheres, such as newspapers. In the face of high numbers of casualties, fatalities, and shocking wounds, notions of decency had to be altered. Descriptions of attacks conveyed basic information such as how the victim was killed and whether a weapon was used. George Anderson, for instance, was simply described as 'cut[ting] the deceased's throat' and there was no reference to the wounds or the blood loss, as had been commonplace in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing between 1900 and July 1914.<sup>403</sup> Perhaps because of the atrocities that occurred in France it was thought more appropriate to leave out upsetting details concerning the deaths of children. Even when wounds were mentioned it was with a lot more ambiguity than in the previous sub-sample's newspaper coverage. It was reported that Samuel Heron's victim was 'wounded severely on the head' and Joseph Wilmott 'killed his children'.<sup>404</sup> The omission of more graphic details of paternal child killing in this period also speaks to Rowbotham and Stevenson's findings that crime news virtually disappeared from newspapers during the First World War since it would not have been cheering to read of the brutal murder of a child by its father. Because the newspaper articles were significantly shorter than the newspaper coverage of cases in the previous chapter there was not enough space for lengthy descriptions of injuries sustained by victims.

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<sup>402</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 210.

<sup>403</sup> 'Death Sentence', *The Sunday Times* (22 November 1914), p. 5

<sup>404</sup> 'Murder and Highway Robbery in Ireland', *The Times* (16 February 1915), p. 5, 'Robbery and Murder', *Manchester Guardian* (16 February 1915), p. 4, and 'Confession of Triple Murder', *The Times* (31 May 1917).

### *Sensationalism and Public Reaction*

None of the cases in this sub-sample received the amount of coverage and were sensationalised in the same manner as the cases of Arthur Devereux and John Crozier in the previous sub-sample. Only the most sensational of domestic crimes was likely to attract anything approaching sustained coverage in the press during the First World War.<sup>405</sup> There was one case that resonated with the public to the extent that this was recognised in the newspaper coverage itself, that of William Simpson, a private in the army found guilty of the murder of his son. Simpson was sentenced to death, although his sentence was later reprieved. It was reported that Simpson committed the crime while home on leave. He came home to find his house 'a wreck and dirty', his 'poor children terribly neglected', and learnt that his wife had 'brought soldiers to the house in his absence'.<sup>406</sup> Simpson had sent a large proportion of his army pay back home to his wife but she had 'spent it in drink'.<sup>407</sup> Additionally, Simpson's victim suffered from water on the brain and he found his child's illness 'painful to witness' which was compounded by his wife's neglect of the child in his absence.<sup>408</sup> All of these factors were emphasised in the press and were used to explain why Simpson was motivated to kill his son.

Simpson's case spoke to wider anxieties about women's conduct during the First World War. Wives faced surveillance and were sexually suspect during the First World War with men away at the front, thus, the morale of men was undermined if women 'misbehaved'.<sup>409</sup> Allegations of misconduct against Simpson's wife were heightened because he was a soldier home on leave. In the early twentieth century women were expected to keep their children and lodgings clean, drink in moderation, show marital fidelity, and defer

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<sup>405</sup> Rowbotham, Stevenson and Pegg, *Crime News and Modern Britain*, p. 132.

<sup>406</sup> 'Shall Private Simpson Die?', *Daily Express* (14 July 1915), p. 5, 'Court of Criminal Appeal', *The Times* (13 July 1915), p. 3.

<sup>407</sup> 'Court of Criminal Appeal', *The Times* (13 July 1915), p. 3.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. 'Water on the brain' is now known as hydrocephalus.

<sup>409</sup> S. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (Routledge: London, 2002), p. 62.

to their husband's paternal authority.<sup>410</sup> The judge stated that while Simpson had 'reason to be angry with his wife', this was no justification for the crime, highlighting that whilst a wife's unfeminine behaviour was not a mitigating factor there was sympathy for men who felt humiliated.<sup>411</sup>

Martin Wiener has explored the extent to which a wife's behaviour remained a relevant mitigating factor in the trials of wife killers in the Victorian period.<sup>412</sup> Wiener contends that provocation by means of words, light physical violence, and alcohol consumption rarely succeeded in the later nineteenth century.<sup>413</sup> Infidelity by a wife was the most likely provocation to bring about a lenient legal response at the trial of a wife killer but even this, Wiener argues, was less likely to work by the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>414</sup> Simpson's wife was portrayed as the villain in the newspaper coverage by refusing to engage with her motherly and wifely duties and Simpson as the betrayed, brave soldier deceived by his wife. The upheaval felt by his wife at her husband's absence from the family home was ignored in favour of portraying Simpson sympathetically. For the period late 1914 to late 1918, it is clear that army service was also taken into account when punishing men who killed their children. Indeed, it was reported several times that Simpson was wearing his army uniform to his appeal trial.<sup>415</sup> There was sympathy for soldiers, such as Simpson, who had acted as a brave paternal protector in the face of wife's disreputable behaviour.

The *Daily Express* positioned itself as the authority on Simpson's case by quoting past articles, engaging with public sympathy, and securing interesting interviews with those present at Simpson's trial. The newspaper reported that 'people throughout Tyneside', Simpson's hometown, expressed the 'greatest sympathy' for Simpson by organising a

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<sup>410</sup> Lister, 'Masculinity and Fatherhood in Representations of Male-Perpetrated Child Homicide in London', p. 165.

<sup>411</sup> 'Court of Criminal Appeal', *The Times* (13 July 1915), p. 3.

<sup>412</sup> M. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004), pp. 170-235.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>415</sup> 'Court of Criminal Appeal', *The Times* (13 July 1915), p. 3.

petition for the reprieve of his sentence.<sup>416</sup> Local support for Simpson was such that even the Lord Mayor of Newcastle commented on the 'great public sympathy' shown for the soldier.<sup>417</sup> As well as commenting on the amount of public sympathy Simpson received, the *Daily Express* implored its readers to support Simpson by helping him to overturn his sentence, stating 'unless great public effort is made' Simpson would be executed. Simpson was eventually reprieved and his sentence was commuted to one of penal servitude. In one of the final articles printed in the *Daily Express* it was insinuated that its reporting had been instrumental in securing the reprieve of his sentence and generating public sympathy stating that 'hundreds of letter' had been brought to the newspaper's office.<sup>418</sup>

Sympathy was also constructed for Simpson by an article written by Eileen Turner in the *Daily Express*, 'the only woman in court', who provided an intense and emotive account of the trial and the reasons why she sympathised with Simpson and why he should be reprieved.<sup>419</sup> It is significant that the *Daily Express* sent a female reporter to cover the news of the Court of Appeal given wider anxieties about women and the home front. Turner detailed the extenuating circumstances claiming that Simpson did the 'bravest things a brave man could do: he risked his life to relieve the sufferings of his little child'.<sup>420</sup> To provide a counterpoint to his wife's behaviour, she also emphasised Simpson's army service during which he 'suffer[ed] untold hardships in the service of his country'.<sup>421</sup> The addition of this eye-witness account of the trial added weight to the newspaper's sympathy campaign on behalf of Simpson.

It is evident from one of the newspaper articles on Simpson's murder of his child that his state of mind was in question, perhaps a desperate attempt by his lawyer to prevent him from facing the gallows. The *Daily Express* drew attention to the 'terrible mental

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<sup>416</sup> 'Shall Private Simpson Die?', *Daily Express* (14 July 1915), p. 5.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>418</sup> 'Private Simpson Reprieved', *Daily Express* (16 July 1915), p. 5.

<sup>419</sup> 'Brave Man or Murderer?', *Daily Express* (15 July 1915), p. 5.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

affliction' he was suffering when he murdered his child.<sup>422</sup> However, it is not certain whether this phrase referred to insanity as prescribed in the M'Naughtan Rules or whether he was very upset at the situation under which he found his son.<sup>423</sup> It was not recorded in the newspaper coverage of Simpson's trial that an insanity plea was raised and the above quote was the only reference to his sanity in the five articles published on his case. Perhaps the *Daily Express* thought that mention of Simpson's state of mind would garner him further sympathy. However, because the newspaper failed to go into detail about his mental state this approach fell flat.

### *Inclusion of Images*

Photographs were only included in one case in this sub-sample, in comparison to 3.5 per cent of cases in the previous sub-sample. The case was that of William Juta, a medical student who lived in Edinburgh who killed his wife, child, mother-in-law, and then himself. The photographs (see Figures 2.1 and 2.2) show Juta and his child, and Juta's wife and their child. The photographs were printed on the photograph pages of the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Express* and appear to be family photographs possibly taken in a professional photography studio given their formal pose. Since this case was shrouded in such mystery, no motive was known for the crime nor was one ever suggested in the newspaper coverage, the inclusion of photographs allowed a small degree of insight into the perpetrator and victims of the case.

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<sup>422</sup> 'Private Simpson Reprieved', *Daily Express* (16 July 1915), p. 5.

<sup>423</sup> See 'Literature Review' Footnote 150 for a discussion of the M'Naughtan Rules.



*Figures 2.1 and 2.2: Photographs of William Juta with his child and his wife and child, Daily Mirror (21 September 1917), p. 7*

## **5. Understandings of Mental Illness**

This section of the analysis focuses on how the mental health of the sub-sample of paternal child killers was discussed in the newspaper coverage of their cases. Because of the small size of the sample, the fact that none of the men were found guilty but insane at their trials, and the short length of most of the articles, the mental health of paternal child killers did not feature with as much regularity or in as much detail as the previous sub-sample. This analysis, therefore, follows a different structure to the previous chapter. Firstly, the reasons as to why mental health was not mentioned in the newspaper coverage of the cases in this sub-sample are discussed. This is followed by an examination of the language used in the newspaper coverage of the few articles which did allude to mental illness. Next, the way in which army service was portrayed in relation to mental illness is examined. Finally, the connection between suicide, mental illness and criminal culpability is looked at. This is not an attempt at retrospective diagnosis since emotional repertoires change over time and between societies. Rather this analysis determines how understandings about mental health



and criminal culpability were packaged for consumption by newspapers readers and to understand how different actors conceived mental illness.

Unlike the previous sub-sample, trial transcripts from the Old Bailey are unavailable for comparison with cases in this sub-sample tried at this court which means that it cannot be determined how much detail that was given and recorded during a trial was included in the newspaper coverage. However, conclusions drawn in the previous chapter about the extent to which newspapers moulded the testimony of medical experts to be more understandable to their readership by prioritising lay understandings of mental illness can be applied to the findings in this chapter. Comparison of the Old Bailey trial transcripts with the newspaper coverage of the relevant cases in the first sub-sample revealed that newspaper journalists often ignored evidence given at the Old Bailey relating to the mental health of paternal child killers. This was done when mental illness did not fit the narrative created by the journalist rather than because there was no evidence relating to mental illness given during the trial. Following this, the lack of references to the mental health of paternal child killers in the newspaper coverage of their cases might have been due to an editorial choice due to the volume of wartime news rather than a lack of evidence. Press reports were selective and manipulated evidence given in court and, therefore, promoted a specific view of what constituted criminal culpability. In regards to the First World War, mental illness in relation to criminal culpability was not mentioned in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers not only due to space constraints but also because mental illness during this time was a particularly pointed subject.

Insanity was mentioned in the newspaper coverage of six of the cases in this sub-sample (35 per cent), three of which were instances of paternal child killing followed by suicide or attempted suicide. Their mental health was not ignored in their trials just because the war was taking place. It might be expected that the psychological impact of the First World War would have featured in this sub-sample given that by 1918 18,596 pensions had

been awarded for shell shock, neurasthenia and other war-induced mental illness.<sup>424</sup> That is not to say that all paternal child killers suffered with mental illness or if they did that this was due to their war experience but since thousands of soldiers were treated for war-related mental health issues during the First World War a crossover between the two might have been expected. However, as Fiona Reid argues most men did not become psychological casualties during the First World War - the majority dealt reasonably well with the stresses and strains of intense warfare.<sup>425</sup> Further, Tracey Loughran warns against reducing the First World War to 'trauma', especially mental trauma, as it is now often portrayed as an inevitable outcome of any experience of war.<sup>426</sup> The emphasis on emotional breakdown and psychiatric illness has obscured the fact that most men coped well with the demands made upon them during wartime.<sup>427</sup>

There was a prevalent stigma surrounding mental illness, in society more generally and particularly for soldiers, meaning that newspapers may have shied away from publicly labelling soldiers as 'mad'. During the war there was popular and political support for initiatives that ensured shell-shocked men were treated with compassion and without stigma. This, Reid claims, was only partially successful due to age-old prejudice about mental illness.<sup>428</sup> Additionally, the Edwardian concept of masculinity which placed value on stoic endurance and self-control, made it difficult for soldiers to voice their fears about fighting in the war.<sup>429</sup> This helps to explain the cloaked language used in the newspaper coverage to

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<sup>424</sup> F. Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930* (Bloomsbury: London, 2010), p. 20. This figure excludes those who were suffering but were not awarded pensions and those who may have been suffering from nervous disorders but were diagnosed with other complaints.

<sup>425</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>426</sup> T. Loughran, 'Shell Shock, Trauma and the First World War: The Making of a Diagnosis and its Histories', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 67 (2012), p. 97.

<sup>427</sup> J. Bourke, 'Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Sufferings of "Shell-Shocked" Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), p. 57.

<sup>428</sup> F. Reid, ' "His Nerves Gave Way": Shell Shock, History and the Memory of the First World War in Britain', *Endeavour*, 38 (2014), p. 95.

<sup>429</sup> M. Roper, 'Between Manliness and Masculinity: The "War Generation" and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914-1950', *Journal of British Studies*, 14 (2005), p. 347.

describe the mental health of the handful of fathers whose mental health was alluded to in the committal of their crimes.

### *The Language of Mental Illness*

In the newspaper coverage of those cases that did discuss the mental health of the paternal child killers, medical language was not used nor was the testimony of medical experts included. Whereas in the newspaper coverage of the first sub-sample of cases the voices and opinions of different actors pertaining to mental health were distinguishable in the articles, this was not evident in this sub-sample. It was only in the case of Arnold Warren, who murdered his two-year-old son, that the *Manchester Guardian* stated 'it was urged in defence that the prisoner was insane at the moment of committing the crime'.<sup>430</sup> It was not reported why an insanity plea was urged, what the symptoms of Warren's mental illness were, whether medical evidence was given during his trial, or how his mental health related to killing his son.

In the few references to the mental health of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample euphemistic language was used to talk about the relation between mental health and the crime committed. Robert Speerly had been 'reduced to great distress' due to unemployment prior to murdering his daughter and he was recommended to mercy because of the 'extraordinary stress' he was under.<sup>431</sup> Similarly, before killing his wife and four children Harris Cocker's mind reportedly became 'unhinged' due to the ill health of his wife.<sup>432</sup> The language used in the newspaper reports of both of these cases reflected lay rather than medical understandings of insanity similar to the previous sub-sample. Although these phrases drew attention to the defendant's state of mind they did so in a discreet way

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<sup>430</sup> 'Sentenced to Death for Killing His Infant Son', *Manchester Guardian* (24 October 1914), p. 5.

<sup>431</sup> 'Death Sentence Commuted', *The Observer* (4 April 1915), p. 9.

<sup>432</sup> 'Chemist's Family Poisoned', *The Times* (31 July 1918), p. 3. Interestingly, Cocker's wife was said to be suffering from neurasthenia which is the most medical term used in the newspaper coverage relating to this sub-sample of cases.

and the reader was not provided with any evidence of symptoms or indicators of mental illness.

There are three explanatory factors for the lack of lengthier discussion about the mental health of paternal child killers in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases. Firstly, the paternal child killer in question was not thought to be insane and therefore there was no reason to discuss this aspect of the case. Secondly, newspaper editors were not willing to dedicate space in the newspaper to covering cases of paternal child killing. As was shown in section three of this chapter, newspaper articles about cases of paternal child killing in the sub-sample were significantly shorter and the total number of articles on each case was much smaller. Consequently, only the most interesting aspects of the case made it into the article and the amount of space available to discuss the mental health of a paternal child killer diminished. Finally, newspaper journalists and editors may have been unwilling to comment on the mental health of men accused of the murder of their child due to the number of casualties afflicted with a mental illness as a result of their army service. It seems likely that due to space constraints and preference for war-related news, the mental health of paternal child killers was excluded from the newspaper coverage.

### *The Impact of Army Service*

A central issue related to the field of mental health in the period 1914 to 1918 was the impact of the First World War on understandings of mental illness and on the mental health of those who fought in it. Of the three men in this sub-sample who were reported to have been in the army at the time they killed their children, it was not stated in the newspaper coverage that they were suffering from a mental illness. However, their crimes were related in some way to their war experiences. For example, Thomas Weedon's murder of his son and subsequent suicide were reportedly carried out because he did not want his son to

‘suffer the same miseries’ he had and because Weedon ‘dreaded the army’.<sup>433</sup> In the same article it was also stated that Weedon had come to find life ‘unbearable’ after being called up to serve, directly attributing his army experiences to his decision to commit suicide. Indeed, Suzie Grogan finds that many newspapers reported on a number of suicides of soldiers and ex-soldiers that were directly attributed to battle trauma.<sup>434</sup> Cowardice and shirking were recognised as crimes during the First World War and this may have decreased the likelihood of soldiers speaking openly about their fears concerning the war due to potentially shameful implications.<sup>435</sup>

Another case in which the perpetrator was a soldier was that of Thomas Pole, a private in the Sherwood Foresters. Pole murdered his wife’s infant daughter who was born while he was away serving in France. It was stated that Pole was not the father, indicating that his wife had had an affair whilst her husband was away at war. His anger at being betrayed was enacted on the child rather than his wife. In one article the reader was told that the child was born while Pole was in France, where he won the Distinguished Conduct Award, juxtaposing his wife’s illicit and deceitful behaviour with his own brave conduct.<sup>436</sup> Interestingly, both Simpson and Pole’s actions in killing their children were contrasted with his wife’s dishonest conduct and the moral culpability for the crime was shifted onto the wife. Evidently if a soldier was betrayed by his wife whilst he was away fighting at the front then his crimes against his children were somewhat excused. This contrasts with the previous sub-sample in which a father’s army service rarely was used to such an extent to excuse the murder of his child.

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<sup>433</sup> ‘Dreaded the Army’, *Daily Mirror* (14 February 1917), p. 2.

<sup>434</sup> S. Grogan, *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War’s Legacy for Britain’s Mental Health* (Pen and Sword History: Barnsley, 2014), p. 103.

<sup>435</sup> Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, p. 77.

<sup>436</sup> *Manchester Guardian* (15 July 1918), p. 8.

### *Representations of Suicide and Mental Illness*

In three cases (17.5 per cent) the perpetrator committed suicide after killing his children, and in a further case one father attempted to kill himself. In two of the cases in which the father committed suicide his sanity was questioned at the coroner's inquest with a view to finding him either temporarily insane or of unsound mind. None of the fathers who committed suicide were found to have committed 'felo-de-se' perhaps reflecting its outdated use.<sup>437</sup> By ascribing deaths by suicide to temporary moments of insanity or chronic mental illness, the agency of these men in their own deaths was denied.<sup>438</sup>

As with discussions of mental health in this sub-sample, in cases in which the paternal child killer also committed suicide his sanity was not discussed in the newspaper coverage to the same extent as in the previous sub-sample. Despite findings of unsound mind and temporary insanity in two cases, there was no discussion of the man's state of mind in the lead up to the crime and the reasons why the verdict was returned. In one case of paternal child killing, that of William Juta, in which the father committed suicide after killing his child, wife, and mother-in-law his sanity was not discussed in the newspaper coverage. Similarly, the sanity of Richard Luck, who attempted to commit suicide after killing his partner and their child, was not brought up in the newspaper coverage. The reason given for his crimes and attempted suicide was that his partner's husband, who was away fighting at the front, was due to return and the couple did not want to confront what they had done. It was made clear in the newspaper coverage of this case that Luck and his partner decided to kill themselves, and their child, together out of shame and guilt. Surprisingly, Luck and his partner were not castigated in the newspaper coverage for their betrayal of a soldier. Apart from a somewhat scathing headline, which announced that the couple 'could not face [the]

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<sup>437</sup> 'Felo-de-se' refers to an act of illegal suicide, i.e. one in which the perpetrator was deemed sane when he committed the act.

<sup>438</sup> K. Bogaert, ' "Due to His Abnormal Mental State": Exploring Accounts of Suicide among First World War Veterans treated at the Ontario Military Hospital at Cobourg, 1919-1946', *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 51 (2018), p. 106.

music', no comment was made about their affair.<sup>439</sup> The under-stated response may have been due to reluctance to dwell on a case of a soldier who'd been wronged as well as to avoid feeding the anxieties of men away at the front about their wives behaviour in their absence. In the case of William Juta, the newspapers may have felt unable to comment on his mental health due to lack of information since Juta murdered those closest to him who would have been able to discuss his state of mind prior to the crime. For Luck, however, the newspapers may have been unwilling to defend the actions of a man who had had an affair with a soldier's wife. Additionally, the lack of space in the newspapers given to crime news during the First World War prevented in-depth discussion of mental health and criminal culpability.

## **Conclusions to Chapter Four**

Cases of paternal child killing carried out during the First World War have not been explored by previous historians who have worked on this subject. It is clear that the First World War changed the way in which cases of paternal child killing were reported in the press. Variety did not characterise the cases or the newspaper of coverage to same extent as in the first sub-sample. The way in which newspapers reported on cases of paternal child killing were dealt with uniformly in short newspaper articles which spared any extraneous details. There was less newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing for two main reasons.

Primarily, during the First World War national newspapers reported on news relating to the war. As such, news about crimes committed in Britain was not important or interesting enough to take up space in the newspapers. Secondly, newspapers had a role to play during the conflict in maintaining morale, at both the home and Western front, and news reports of men murdering their families would not have made for a comforting read. Consequently, the newspaper coverage allotted for crimes, even violent ones, diminished.

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<sup>439</sup> ' "Could Not Face Music" ', *Daily Mirror* (30 July 1918), p. 2.

As there was not enough space to do each case justice, certain aspects of the case were left out of the newspaper coverage in favour of the basic details. In particular, the mental health of paternal child killers was not discussed in the same detail as in the previous sub-sample. From the few examples of euphemistic language used to discuss the mental health of paternal child killers in this sub-sample it is evident that mental illness did play some roles in their actions. However, newspaper journalists and editors chose not to focus on this aspect of the case. As posited earlier in this chapter, mental health may have been too controversial a topic to discuss during a war which saw unprecedented numbers of psychological casualties. Additionally, because there was lack of space in the newspapers to discuss crime news generally there was simply not enough scope to discuss mental health and criminal culpability in any meaningful way.

The First World War also altered the way in which cases of paternal child killing were dealt with by the courts. In cases in which the paternal child killer was charged with murder, findings of insanity completely disappeared and death sentences were imposed more frequently, although a number of these were commuted to penal servitude for life. Given the prevalence of 'guilty but insane' verdicts in the period 1900 to July 1914 it is doubtful that mental health did not play some role in paternal child killing in the period late 1914 to 1918. This suggests that the courts imposed strict verdicts and punishments in attempt to not appear as if control was being lost on the Home front whilst war was being waged on the Western front.



## **Chapter Five: “A Starving Father’s Crime”: Wartime Experiences and**

### **Post-War Recession, Paternal Child Killing, 1919 to 1929**

The period following the First World War is portrayed as marking the end of Victorian certainties: society was less secure, there was a world-wide economic depression, and labour unrest undermined men’s roles as breadwinners.<sup>440</sup> This chapter examines the extent to which the post-war recession had an impact on fatherhood and was used to explain cases of paternal child killing. Laura King argues that structural unemployment had crucial consequences for fatherhood and masculinity as many fathers could not fulfil their traditional role as provider for their families.<sup>441</sup> This was difficult for men who took this role seriously. This chapter argues that newspapers dwelt on socio-economic factors, such as unemployment and army service, to help explain acts of paternal child killing and to make them more understandable, shifting the blame from the men themselves to circumstances beyond their control. These socio-economic factors also helped to explain breakdowns in mental health. Rather than ascribe the crimes of paternal child killers to innate evil or brutality, army service and unemployment, among other factors, offered a tangible reason for men to suffer a breakdown in their mental health.

The second argument made in this chapter is that wartime experiences were used in the newspaper coverage of ex-soldiers who killed their children to explain their actions and provoke sympathy and understanding in readers. Ginger Frost analyses two well-publicised murder trials of ex-soldiers who murdered their illegitimate children, both of which are included in the sub-sample examined in this chapter and were found in the newspapers using the keyword search.<sup>442</sup> Frost argues that although newspapers were more sympathetic to

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<sup>440</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books Limited: London, 1996), p. 14.

<sup>441</sup> L. King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015), p. 25.

<sup>442</sup> G. Frost, ‘ “Such a Poor Finish”: Illegitimacy, Murder, and War Veterans in England, 1918-1923’, *Historical Reflections*, 42 (2016), p. 91.

veterans who murdered their children, regarding them as victims of circumstances, this line of defence did not succeed with the Home Office in overturning a death sentence, especially as the war moved further into the past.<sup>443</sup> However, as demonstrated by cases examined in this chapter, for paternal child killers who had served in the First World War the effects of their experiences on their mental health and general well-being were regularly detailed in the newspaper coverage and ex-soldiers were frequently found guilty but insane. Frost also contends that unemployment was more likely to secure a finding of guilty but insane due to the post-war recession. In the sub-sample analysed in this chapter, the percentage of unemployed paternal child killers was consistent with the percentage of those fathers who were unemployed in the previous two sub-samples (from the periods 1900 to July 1914 and August 1914 to 1918). Unemployment was mentioned in the newspaper coverage but not at the exclusion of army service. By only examining two cases Frost underestimates the pervasive effects of the First World War on both the ex-soldiers who fought in it and the general public who lived through it.

This chapter also contends that the nature of press reporting on violent crimes, such as paternal child killing, changed due to the First World War. As was detailed in the previous chapter, because of wartime censorship newspaper articles, including those on the most serious of crimes, were condensed down to the bare essentials of the case. Although in the period 1919 to 1929 cases of paternal child killing received increased levels of newspaper coverage in comparison to the years of the First World War they did not receive the amount of newspaper coverage of the pre-war years. Lengthier reports on the trials of the coroners' inquest, the police courts, and the assize courts were replaced with shorter articles consisting of only the most important or interesting details of the case. It is argued that this was due to changing readership interests. Cases of violent crime remained newsworthy but other crimes, such as gang- and motor-crime, also became of curiosity and concern to

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<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

readers. Additionally, less graphic descriptions of the case, such as the way the child victims were killed, were not included in the newspaper coverage. Newspaper readers were still affected by the brutality incurred by the First World War and it was not thought appropriate to include graphic details of a child's death in national newspapers.

Another argument made in this chapter is that the punishment of paternal child killing, paternal child murder in particular, became less severe in the 1920s. The number of men detained in criminal lunatic asylums was higher than the number sentenced to death and those that were sentenced to death more often than not had their sentence commuted to penal servitude for life. Janet Weston suggests that the increasing tendency towards more lenient punishments was due to a decline in confidence that traditional forms of punishment, such as the death sentence, were effective deterrents.<sup>444</sup> Weston argues that in the interwar period there was interest in using punishment to rehabilitate criminals and confidence that medical professionals could play a key role in this by giving evidence on the mental health of offenders.<sup>445</sup> Arguably, this had already been in motion since the beginning of the twentieth century as apparent in the first chapter of this thesis. Developments in the psychiatric field during the First World War helped to facilitate this but so, too, did a desire to interpret cases of violent and disturbing crime within a psychological framework. Some crimes, such as paternal child killing, were so unfathomable due to the victims involved or the way that the victims were killed that mental illness was posited as an increasingly viable explanation. Rather than view these types of criminals as being part of a deviant class or inherently bad, their mental health became a deciding factor in the outcome of their trials and the punishment they received. Additionally, as Clive Emsley highlights, the campaign for the abolition of capital punishment was revived in the 1920s.<sup>446</sup> This may have lead to some

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<sup>444</sup> J. Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System and Sexual Crimes in England, 1919-1960s: Diagnosing Deviance* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2018), p. 15.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>446</sup> C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England* (Pearson Educated Limited: Harlow, 2011), p. 205.

types of violent crime which were punished with the death sentence receiving lighter punishment in the form of penal servitude for life or detention in a criminal lunatic asylum.

Finally, it is argued that understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were presented differently in the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killers in the period 1919 to 1929. Firstly, there was more room for discussions of the mental health of paternal child killers whose sanity was in question at the time of the crime. While in the earlier period (1900 to July 1914) the mental health of paternal child killers was frequently referred to in the newspaper coverage of the cases, more attention was paid to other aspects of the crime, such as gory or mysterious elements of the case. The second way in which newspaper journalists and editors presented the criminal culpability of men whose sanity was in question differently in the period 1919 to 1929 was by focussing more on the testimony of medical experts and medical understandings of criminal culpability. In the period 1900 to July 1914 journalists relied on lay and legal understandings of mental illness in order to make the coverage of the cases easier to understand. By the 1920s there was clearly a greater desire for medical knowledge on matters of criminal culpability and mental illness, and greater confidence that newspaper readers had some basic understanding of the concepts being proposed by medical experts, hence their inclusion in the newspaper articles.

This chapter explores the newspaper coverage of a sub-sample of 87 cases reported on in the period 1919 to 1929. The analysis is split into five sections which focus on different aspects of the material found in newspaper articles and questions what these details reveal about the way in which paternal child killers were conceptualised. The first section examines the biographical details of the paternal child killers and their victims. This is followed by an exploration of the charges, convictions and punishments of paternal child killers. Section three explores the extent of newspaper reporting on individual cases. In section four the editorial devices employed by newspapers are examined. Finally, the way in which

understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were portrayed in the newspaper coverage is considered.

## **1. Overview of the Sub-sample**

In this section the biographical details of paternal child killers and their victims are analysed to demonstrate the range of individual circumstances of the alleged perpetrators in the sub-sample. As argued in chapter three, paternal child killers came from a range of backgrounds and circumstances. The geographic spread and nationality of men in the sub-sample is examined, as well as marital status, occupation, and type of housing in which the accused paternal child killer lived. The relationship the paternal child killer had with his wife or partner, and his behaviour after killing the child and in court is also considered. The number, age, and gender of the child victims, in addition to their legitimacy, is examined, and whether there were any other victims in the case.

### *Geographical Spread of Cases and Nationality of Paternal Child Killers*

The majority of cases (85 per cent) were committed in England and Wales, with only 14 per cent of cases occurring in other countries (see Table 3.1). A number of different nationalities were reported in this sub-sample of cases (see Table 3.2), the majority of which corresponded with the country in which the crime was committed. This demonstrates, much like the previous two sub-samples, that journalists covering cases of paternal child killing made no attempt to depict this crime as one committed by foreign men. The nationality of paternal child killers was rarely explicitly discussed in the newspaper coverage, usually it was mentioned as part of the biographical information of the perpetrator. Nearly 30 per cent of the cases committed in England and Wales occurred in London, yet there were a number of cases committed in other large cities, such as Edinburgh, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Manchester, as well as a number of towns, and villages. Although access to cases tried at the

Old Bailey may have been easier for journalists to come by, cases from outside the capital were thought newsworthy enough to warrant inclusion in a national newspaper.

Country	Number of Cases
England	72
Wales	3
Scotland	1
Ireland	1
America	1
Canada	2
Austria	1
Belgium	1
France	3
Germany	1
Poland	1
Total	87

*Table 3.1: The location of incidences of paternal child killing, 1919-1929*

Nationality	Number of Cases
English	71
Irish	1
Scottish	1
Welsh	3
American	2
French	3
Austrian	1
German	1
Canadian	1
Belgian	2
Polish	1
Total	87

*Table 3.2: Nationality of paternal child killers, 1919-1929*

#### *Marital Status of Paternal Child Killers*

Half of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample were married at the time they killed their children. However, there were eighteen cases (20 per cent) in which different relationships were reported, as can be seen in Table 3.3. Six men (7 per cent) in the sample were widowed and the grief that often accompanied their widowhood was offered as an explanation for the crimes committed against their children. This suggests that the unsettling nature of the loss of both a loved one and a conventional relationship was too much for some men to cope with. In a number of cases it would appear that the breakdown

of a traditional relationship, either through widowhood or separation, was used to explain why the father killed his child.

Marital Status	Number of Cases
Married	43
Widowed	6
Separated	5
Lived with mother of the child	2
Lived with another woman	5
Unidentified	26
Total	87

*Table 3.3: The marital status of men in the sub-sample, 1919-1929*

#### *Employment Status and Occupation of Paternal Child Killers*

Around 17 per cent of the paternal child killers were said to have been unemployed at the time they killed their children. A further 65 per cent were reported to have had an occupation or trade and there was no information provided on the occupation of the remaining 18 per cent of the cases. A range of occupations were reported in this sub-sample, including manual employment, such as a labourer, a miner, a farm labourer, a weaver, a policeman, and a fisherman, as well as some lower middle class occupations, such as a clerk and a teacher. There were also some upper middle class jobs detailed, such as a merchant, a president of a bank, and a businessman.<sup>447</sup>

Although unemployment has been identified as an explanation as to why fathers killed their children, both in the previous sub-samples and by Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson, unemployment was particularly pertinent in the interwar period due to chronic unemployment, underemployment, and the post-war recession. For working class men and women in the interwar period unemployment in some form was a familiar experience.<sup>448</sup> It is evident that unemployment and the pressure to provide for their families affected some fathers to a very destructive degree. Fathers often felt guilty and ashamed that they were

<sup>447</sup> Unfortunately the newspaper coverage did not go into more detail about what type of business he was in.

<sup>448</sup> R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (University Oxford Press: Oxford, 1998), p. 112.

unable to keep their children.<sup>449</sup> Whilst some fathers were driven to kill their children by the worry and stress their unemployment caused, some children died through more indirect means, such as the poverty ensuing from unemployment.

#### *Army Record of Paternal Child Killers*

In this sub-sample 30 per cent of the paternal child killers were reported to have served in the First World War. Most had only fought in this conflict but there were a couple of men who were career soldiers. Although by the end of the period analysed here the First World War had ended eleven years ago, the conflict was still prominent in the public's mind and army service remained a relevant feature of the biography of paternal child killers. Clive Emsley states that when newspapers labelled men as former soldiers it was probably just a descriptive category rather than an explanation for their behaviour.<sup>450</sup> In a later study, Emsley does concede that there was much public sympathy for men who appeared to have been mentally damaged by war and that allowances were made in the courts for shell-shocked veterans who had moral or criminal lapses.<sup>451</sup> Some fathers were simply referred to as an 'ex-soldier' or mention was made that they had 'served in the Great War' but it was more usual for newspapers to provide a short account of their experiences, especially if they had been injured, received a medal for their service, or had served for a lengthy amount of time.

The high percentage of cases in which it was reported that the paternal child killer had fought in the First World War indicates that army service, and in some cases the mental health problems it wrought, was seen to be a legitimate way to explain a violent crime. This

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<sup>449</sup> S. Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (John Murray: London, 2015), p. 74.

<sup>450</sup> C. Emsley, 'Violent Crime in England in 1919: Post-War Anxieties and Press Narratives', *Continuity and Change*, 23 (2008), p. 189.

<sup>451</sup> C. Emsley, *Soldier, Sailor, Beggarman, Thief: Crime and the British Armed Services since 1914* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013), p. 150.



is contrary to what Ginger Frost finds in her study.<sup>452</sup> By looking at a bigger sub-sample of cases it is evident that army service remained a relevant biographical detail of paternal child killers until the late 1920s. The emotional and cultural resonance of the damage wrought by the First World War is reflected in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers who were ex-soldiers.

### *Type of Housing Paternal Child Killers Lived In*

There were several different types of housing recorded in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of paternal child killers as indicated by Table 3.4. The inclusion of this detail allowed a broader picture of the perpetrator to be constructed. Eilidh Garret *et al.* argue that in the late Victorian and Edwardian period housing conditions reflected income differentials and overcrowding, and this was still evident in the 1920s, particularly concerning the associated social status of those who occupied a certain type of house.<sup>453</sup> Colonel Edmund Wray, for instance, lived in an old Georgian country house of moderate size, or as *The Times* referred to it, a 'small country mansion'.<sup>454</sup> Ernest Coates, who killed his wife and two step-children, lived in a 'superior residential suburb'.<sup>455</sup> In contrast, Arthur Latham was reported to live in a 'workman's house'.<sup>456</sup> Attention was focussed on Wray's and Coate's houses because they were large and in well-to-do areas. They were not characteristic of where it was assumed crime was carried out. Revealing that a paternal child killer lived in a large house added intrigue to the case.

The unsuitable conditions in which some children lived were detailed not only to cause intrigue among readers but to provide an insight into how 'lower' class parents looked after their children. Arthur Cuttell was charged with the manslaughter of his child and at his

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<sup>452</sup> Frost, 'Such a Poor Finish', p. 91-111.

<sup>453</sup> E. Garrett, A. Reid, K. Schurer, and S. Szreter, *Changing Family Size in England and Wales: Place, Class and Demography, 1891-1911* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006), p. 136.

<sup>454</sup> 'Colonel, Wife, and Son Shot', *The Times* (21 October 1926), p. 11.

<sup>455</sup> 'Four People Found Dead at Streatham', *Manchester Guardian* (1 November 1921), p. 3.

<sup>456</sup> 'Two Children Murdered', *Daily Express* (30 June 1919), p. 4.

trial it was revealed by the NSPCC that the rooms in which the Cuttells lived were in a ‘filthy state’.<sup>457</sup> Similarly, William Chattaway and his wife were charged with the manslaughter of their daughter. It was reported that the room in which she lived ‘was not fit for anyone to be in’ and *The Times* described her room as ‘wretched and filthy’.<sup>458</sup> However, negative connotations between class and living conditions were not made as strongly as in the first sub-sample suggesting that these voyeuristic descriptions of the housing of the poor were not deemed as appropriate as they previously had been.

Type of Lodging	Number of Cases
Flat	3
Cottage	4
Tenement building	1
Farm	1
House in its own grounds	1
Maisonette	1
Workman’s house	1
Country house of moderate size	1
One room in a house	1
Unidentified	73
Total	87

*Table 3.4: Lodging of paternal child killers, 1919-1929*

#### *Relationship of Paternal Child Killer with Partner and Children*

In twelve cases (14 per cent) the paternal child killer was said to have had a good relationship with his wife, including being a ‘very happy couple’, being ‘very devoted’ to each other, and being ‘supremely happy’ together. Comparatively, only five fathers (5 per cent) were reported to have had a bad relationship with their wives and in all five of those cases it was due to the husband’s threatening behaviour and ‘outbursts of temper’. In 34 cases (38 per cent) the man was said to be an affectionate father to his children, including being ‘affectionate’, ‘kind’, ‘devoted’, and ‘fond’ of his child. Other fathers’ affection for

<sup>457</sup> ‘Ilford Child’s Death’, *The Times* (3 September 1919), p. 5.

<sup>458</sup> ‘Inhuman Parents Get 5 Years’, *Daily Mail* (8 July 1922), p. 5 and ‘Invalid Daughter Starved’, *The Times* (8 July 1922), p. 8.

their children went beyond these more mundane descriptors. William Turnstall was said to have been 'exceptionally devoted' to his child, his wife and his mother, all of whom he killed, and it was reported that the 'care of his child formed the chief interest' of his life.<sup>459</sup> Similarly, Henry Kidman was 'very kind to his children, whom he almost worshipped' and it was reported that they 'loved him' in return.<sup>460</sup> Lack of evidence of previous violence left these fathers with a degree of respectability, explaining why in so many cases the father's previous affectionate behaviour and fondness for his children was detailed in the newspaper coverage. These descriptions of affectionate relationships jarred with the crimes with which these men had been charged and prompted newspaper readers to question how it was that a loving and affectionate father could commit such a crime. Where the information is available, it can be contended that these descriptions tended to be used in the coverage of cases in which defendants receive relatively favourable verdicts. William Turnstall was found to be guilty of the murder of his family but insane at the time of the crimes and was ordered to be detained during his Majesty's pleasure and Henry Kidman was found guilty of manslaughter instead of murder. There were only seven fathers (8 per cent) who were said to have been unaffectionate, cruel, or not very fond of their children. As with positive descriptions of fatherly behaviour these details were included to signal to readers how to interpret this case and the actions of this father. By highlighting his appalling treatment of his children the case became less shocking because such a man could not be trusted to treat his family properly.

#### *Displays of Emotion by Paternal Child Killers*

In the newspaper coverage of five cases (5 per cent) the men were said to have shown emotion either during their trial or on their arrest. The emotional displays included sobbing during their trial, particularly when evidence was being given, and looking distressed or

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<sup>459</sup> 'Manchester Assizes', *Manchester Guardian* (8 July 1920), p. 14.

<sup>460</sup> 'Tragedy of Temper', *Daily Mirror* (25 March 1927), p. 22.

dejected. In three cases (3 per cent) the men were said to have shown no emotion or were 'calm and collected'.<sup>461</sup> It is significant that journalists paid attention to the displays of emotion in these eight cases and did not include information for the other 79 cases. This suggests that there was something about these emotional displays that was particularly newsworthy and abnormal. The men who were unrestrained clearly showed too much emotion than was considered normal for a man in the 1920s, while the men who showed no emotion at all contravened normal human behaviour.<sup>462</sup> It would be expected that a man on trial for the death of his child would demonstrate remorse or react in some way to the evidence given during the trial.

#### *Number, Gender and Age of Child Victims*

There were 122 child victims in this sub-sample. As can be seen from Tables 3.5 and 3.6 paternal child killers in this period were most likely to kill one child and rarely was it reported that they killed all of the children in their family. The most likely group of children to be killed by their father in this time period were those aged between one and ten years old (see Table 3.7). In six cases (7 per cent) the age of the child was not given, instead a description of their age was provided, such as 'baby', 'newborn', or 'young woman'. As with the previous sub-samples female children were slightly more likely to be the victims of paternal child killers during this period. In 35 cases (39 per cent) the child was female and in 29 cases (33 per cent) the child was male. In a further seventeen cases (19 per cent) both male and female children were killed. Paternal child killers did not only just kill their children, in 20 cases (22 per cent) the perpetrator also killed his wife and in a further five cases an attempt was made on her life. There were also other victims involved including the

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<sup>461</sup> 'Lincolnshire Reeds Mystery', *Manchester Guardian* (4 February 1922), p. 6.

<sup>462</sup> See L. King, ' "Now You See a Great Many Men Pushing Their Pram Proudly": Family-Orientated Masculinity Represented and Experienced in Mid-Twentieth Century Britain', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), pp. 599-617.

perpetrators niece and nephew, a neighbour's child, and a gardener, as well as a number of other children of the paternal child killer whose lives were threatened but who did not die.

Number of Child Victims	Number of Cases
1	61
2	21
3	3
4	2
Total	87

*Table 3.5: The number of child victims per case, 1919-1929*

Number of Children in Family	Number of Child Victims Referred to in Newspaper Reports		
	1	2	3
1	10	0	0
2	5	9	0
3	4	1	2
4	4	1	0
5	3	0	0
6	0	1	1
10	1	0	0
17	2	1	0

*Table 3.6: The number of children in the family (including legitimate, illegitimate, and stepchildren) in comparison to the number of victims, 1919-1929*

Age of Victim(s)	Number of Victim(s)
Under 1 year old	12
1 to 10 years old	70
11 to 18 years old	25
Over 18 years	8
Description	6

*Table 3.7: The age of child victims, 1919-1929*

#### *Legitimacy of the Child Victim(s)*

In 84 per cent of cases the father killed his legitimate child, or children, as can be seen in Table 3.8. In a number of cases it was the child's illegitimacy, or the father's suspicion about the child's paternity, that drove some fathers to kill their children. The illegitimacy of a child was thought to have been a problem for mothers since the stigma was more likely to be

attached to her.<sup>463</sup> However, in this sub-sample there were two quite different instances of paternal child killing in which the very legitimacy of the child victim was used to explain why the father ended its life. Arthur Cuttell was charged with his wife for the manslaughter of their child. Cuttell, however, claimed that he was not the father of the child because the child was born while he was away in the army. His wife stated that the child died from neglect because of her husband's spite and refusal to provide milk for the child. Evidently, for Cuttell, his wife's betrayal was unforgivable and he punished his wife by killing the child. Archibald Crockford, however, claimed he murdered his illegitimate child in order to give the mother of the child her 'freedom', perhaps recognising the social impropriety both his child and partner would face due to the child's illegitimacy.<sup>464</sup>

Relationship to Offender	Number of Cases
Legitimate child	74
Illegitimate child	8
Stepchild	3
Father denied paternity	2
Total	87

Table 3.8: The relationship between victims and offenders, 1919-1929

## 2. The Legal Process

This section examines the legal outcomes of the 75 cases in this sub-sample committed in England and Wales. Cases which occurred in countries outside of England and Wales are not analysed since their legal systems all differed. Due to the fragmentary nature of the information collected from the newspapers there is not enough data to discuss concrete trends in verdicts and punishments but the material can help to elucidate more general themes in the punishment of violent crime in England and Wales for the period 1919 to 1929. The way in which a case of paternal child killing was dealt with by the legal system

<sup>463</sup> See E. Farrell, *"A Most Diabolical Deed": Infanticide and Irish Society, 1850-1900* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2013), T. Ward, 'The Sad Subject of Infanticide: Law, Medicine and Child Murder, 1860-1938', *Social and Legal Studies*, 8 (1999), pp. 163-180, and A. Higginbottom, ' "Sin of the Age": Infanticide and Illegitimacy in Victorian London', in K. Garrigan (ed.), *Victorian Scandals: Representations of Gender and Class* (Ohio University Press: Athens, 1992), pp. 257-288.

<sup>464</sup> 'Infinite Sorrow That These Things Can Be', *Manchester Guardian* (27 June 1922), p. 9.

varied from case to case, reflecting the variety of circumstances and the effects they had on sentencing outcomes.

### *Charges and Verdicts*

The most common charge in this sub-sample was murder, followed by manslaughter, as can be seen in Table 3.9. Yet, as Table 3.10 demonstrates, not all men were found guilty of the crime they were charged with. This complements Clive Emsley's findings that there was a brief increase in the number of murders and attempted murders post-war but that figures for manslaughter declined.<sup>465</sup> It also shows that the newspapers were more interested in reporting on cases of murder than manslaughter or neglect. The verdicts in this sub-sample more closely resemble those of the first sub-sample in that more men were found guilty of murder but insane or insane and unfit to plead than were found guilty of murder. In the second sub-sample none of the paternal child killers were found to be insane and all were sentenced to death, although some had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment.

<b>Crime Charged With</b>	<b>Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers</b>
Murder	38
Manslaughter	8
Manslaughter and grievous bodily harm	1
Murder and attempted suicide	1
Murder and attempted murder	1
Unidentified	26
Total	75

*Table 3.9: The crimes men were charged with in England and Wales, 1919-1929*

Of the men charged with murder, it was reported in ten cases that they were convicted of this crime. There were also a number of men who successfully invoked the insanity plea, were found guilty of a lesser charge of manslaughter, or were found not guilty of murder and subsequently discharged. Similarly, of the men charged with manslaughter nearly half were found guilty of this crime while the other men were either found guilty of a lesser

<sup>465</sup> Emsley, 'Violent Crime in England in 1919', p. 179.

charge, such as neglect, or found not guilty and acquitted. As with the previous sub-samples, men charged with a double crime, such as murder and attempted murder or murder and attempted suicide, were only convicted on a charge of murder. Because the punishment for both murder and attempted suicide was death it was not felt necessary to convict the defendant on both charges.

Original Charge	Verdict	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Murder	Guilty of murder	10
	Guilty of murder but insane	13
	Guilty of manslaughter	2
	Insane, unfit to plead	2
	Not guilty	2
Murder and attempted suicide	Guilty of murder	1
Manslaughter	Guilty of manslaughter	2
	Guilty of neglect and of disposing the body so as to avoid an inquest	1
	Not guilty	2
Unidentified		40
Total		75

Table 3.10: The original charge in comparison to the verdict for cases from England and Wales, 1919-1929

### *Punishments Imposed*

The most frequently imposed punishment in the period 1919 to 1929 was detainment until His Majesty's pleasure be known, closely followed by the death sentence (see Table 3.11). According to the Judicial Statistics for England and Wales in the period 1919 to 1929 there were 693 people charged with murder, 37 per cent of whom were found guilty and sentenced to death.<sup>466</sup> A further 37 per cent were found guilty but insane or insane on arraignment. The equal amount of verdicts is not reflected in this sub-sample. As can be seen in Table 3.11 insanity pleas in this period were fairly successful and sixteen men (21 per cent) were found guilty but insane and nine men (12 per cent) were sentenced to death.

<sup>466</sup> Judicial Statistics, England and Wales, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online [accessed November 2017].



Because the judicial statistics do not provide information on the victims of murder it is difficult to suggest why there was a disparity between my findings and general sentencing patterns in the 1920s. Due to the uneven nature of newspaper coverage, information was only provided on the punishment of 29 paternal child killers. The newspapers did not follow up (or the newspaper articles were not found using the keyword search) on the punishment of the remaining 47 men. Additionally, because paternal child murder involved family members a more lenient view may have been taken in the court. It may have been considered questionable that a previously loving and affectionate father was capable of murdering his own child while sane.

Of the nine men sentenced to death for murder, five men were recommended to mercy but it was only reported in one case that the death sentence had been commuted. Another man was found guilty of manslaughter, recommended to mercy, and sentenced to six months imprisonment. The other three men were found guilty of murder, recommended to mercy, but were sentenced to death and it was not reported whether their sentences were remitted. This is a contrast to the previous two sub-samples in which recommendations to mercy appeared in a higher proportion of murder cases and with more merciful results, namely commuting an individual's death sentence to life imprisonment. This is surprising given that as the twentieth century progressed there was a greater tendency towards a more lenient view of punishment. The nature and purpose of the punishment had always been a topic of debate but this increased throughout the twentieth century. Capital punishment was not in keeping with the notion of a civilised nation.<sup>467</sup> Recourse to findings of insanity or remittal of a sentence to one of penal servitude for life may have been a more desired outcome.

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<sup>467</sup> A. Kilday and D. Nash, 'Introduction: Crime and Punishment in Twentieth Century Britain', in D. Nash and A. Kilday (eds.), *Murder and Mayhem: Crime in Twentieth Century Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018), p. 13.

Charge	Verdict	Punishment	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Murder	Guilty of murder	Death, reprieved	1
		Death, outcome unknown	8
	Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	13
	Guilty of manslaughter	Five years penal servitude	1
	Insane, unfit to plead	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	2
	Not guilty of murder	Discharged	2
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	10
Manslaughter	Guilty of manslaughter	Five years penal servitude	1
		Six months imprisonment	1
	Guilty of neglect and disposing the body so as to avoid an inquest	Eighteen months imprisonment, with hard labour	1
	Not guilty of manslaughter	Discharged	2
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	3
Murder and attempted murder	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	1
Murder and attempted suicide	Guilty of murder	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
Murder and grievous bodily harm	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	1
Charge unknown	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	27
Total			75

*Table 3.11: Charges, verdicts and punishments for paternal child killing committed in England and Wales, 1919-1929*

#### *Indictments with Partners*

In four cases (5 per cent) the father of the child was charged along with his partner and in one case it was stated in the newspaper coverage that the mother should have been charged as an accessory to murder but it is unclear whether this occurred. In all four cases both the mother and father were charged with manslaughter but there was not enough information found to determine whether all four couples were convicted on this charge and received the same punishment. In one case both the mother and father were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to five years penal servitude. In another case both the mother and father were convicted of neglect and disposing of the body of the child so as to avoid an inquest rather than manslaughter and both received the same punishment of eighteen

months hard labour. In the first two sub-samples (for the periods 1900 to July 1914 and August 1914 to 1918) there was a much broader range of verdicts and punishments given to couples who were indicted together for the death of their child. Women tended to receive a lighter punishment due to gendered notions about the treatment of criminal women. However, they did not fare as well in the national press and tended to be castigated for failing to fulfil their motherly duties in caring for their children.

### 3. Nature of Press Coverage

This section analyses the 380 newspaper articles relating to the cases in the sub-sample. This is achieved by looking at the number of newspapers which reported on each case, the number of articles printed per case, the length of articles, and the number of articles printed at each stage of the legal process. This section builds on work done by Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg, whose work examines how and why different newspapers selected, constructed and presented a particular crime's reportage for popular consumption.<sup>468</sup> Neither Cathryn Wilson nor Alesha Lister, both of whom examine newspaper representations of male child murderers, analyse the extent of reporting on each case of paternal child killing. However, by examining how much space was given to cases of paternal child killing a clearer picture of how cases of paternal child killing were represented is gained. After 1918 the national press eclipsed the provincial press and the combined circulation of the national newspapers passed that of the provincial papers in 1923, forcing many to close or merge.<sup>469</sup> As Adrian Bingham and Laura King both note, during the interwar period the practice of reading daily newspapers became a feature of everyday life.<sup>470</sup> This

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<sup>468</sup> J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson and S. Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), p. 9.

<sup>469</sup> A. Bingham, *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2009), p. 17.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17 and King, *Family Men*, p. 10.

had implications for the reporting of paternal child killing in national newspapers since more people were reading newspapers and would learn about this type of crime.

#### *Extent of Reporting on Individual Cases*

Most cases were reported on by between one and three newspapers and received on average five newspaper reports (Tables 3.12 and 3.13). Some criminal offences were space-fillers for newspapers as can be seen in Table 3.14 but the majority of articles consisted of up to 60 lines of text (see Figure 3.1). The majority of cases received a total of between 250 and 299 total lines of text spread across a number of different articles. Only twelve cases (13 per cent) received more in-depth newspaper coverage. As was demonstrated in the previous chapter, during the First World War national newspapers devoted most of their space to news about the war or morale-boosting news from home. Violent crimes, such as paternal child killing, did not receive many column inches. However, with the end of the First World War levels of newspaper reporting on cases of paternal child killing increased but not to same extent as before the war. Interest in violent crime was still a newsworthy topic but had to compete with other forms of crime news, such as motor- or gang-crime, and other types of news, such as the impact of the post-war recession, repercussions of the Armistice, civil unrest in Ireland, and the full enfranchisement of women over the age of 21.

Number of Newspapers	Number of Cases
1	23
2	22
3	18
4	12
5	7
6	3
7	2
Total Number of Cases	87

*Table 3.12: Number of newspapers which reported on each case, 1919-1929*

Number of Articles	Number of Cases
1	19
2	18
3	11
4	6
5	10
6	6
7	6
8	2
9	1
11	2
13	2
15	1
16	2
17	1
Total Number of Cases	87

*Table 3.13: Number of articles found per case, 1919-1929*

Lines of Text	Number of Articles
Less than 10	35
10-19	92
20-29	61
30-39	47
40-49	41
50-59	23
60-69	17
70-79	5
80-89	13
90-99	9
100-149	21
150-199	6
200-249	1
300-349	2

*Table 3.14: Number of lines per article, 1919-1929*

Total Number of Article Lines	Number of Cases
Less than 10	6
10-19	6
20-29	7
30-39	11
40-49	2
50-59	5
60-69	4
70-79	2
80-89	4
90-99	3
100-149	9
150-199	6
200-249	5
250-299	5
350-399	1
400-449	1
450-499	1
500-599	3
600-699	2
700-799	1
1000-1999	3
Total Number of Cases	87

Table 3.15: Number of lines per case, 1919-1929

Figure 3.1 (see Page 192) is an example of an article of 56 lines published in the *Daily Mail*. The article pertains to the case of George Penny who murdered his daughter and attempted to commit suicide in 1923. The article was published after the inquest had been carried out on the body of the child, so, in lieu of a myriad of details about the case, interesting aspects of the crime were emphasised. For instance, Penny threw his daughter from the balcony of his house, a fairly unusual way of killing a child. This method of killing was highlighted in both the headline and was given its own paragraph in the article. Half of the article also discussed the two suicide notes found on Penny. Facsimiles of the notes, to his mother and his wife, were reproduced in the article. The inclusion of the letters provided first-hand Penny's motive for killing his daughter and attempting to commit suicide. The headline and sub-headline of the article provided information on the location of the crime, a nod to the mode of killing, an emotive description of the crime, the relationship of the perpetrator to the defendant, and the crime Penny was charged with. Specific emphasis was placed on the

location and method of killing, and unusualness of this, by using the words 'Balcony Drama'. Eleven cases were found concerning Penny's murder of his daughter, totalling 1005 lines, only one of three cases to receive such an increased level of newspaper attention. It was also revealed in the newspaper coverage that Penny had fought in the First World War and his mental health had suffered as a consequence. Newspaper journalists were also able to exploit these details, in addition to the unusual method of murdering his daughter.

## BALCONY DRAMA.

### FATHER CHARGED WITH MURDER.

#### PATHETIC LETTERS.

At Marylebone yesterday George Stephen Penny, 37, headmaster of Marylebone Grammar School, was charged with attempting to murder his wife by trying to throw her over a balcony at Leith-mansions, Grantully-road, Maida Vale, W., on April 7; with murdering his daughter Joan, aged three, by throwing her out of a window 36½ feet high; and with attempting to commit suicide by jumping from the same window.

It was stated that he was arrested that morning on being discharged from hospital.

A remand was ordered, the police obtaining permission to take the man to prison in a cab.

The inquest on the little girl was also opened yesterday.

Mrs. Penny said her husband contracted malignant malaria during the war and had been very excitable since he came home.

Mrs. Stanley, a widow, living in the same mansions, said she saw Mrs. Penny struggling with her husband on the balcony. Mrs. Penny was clutching the railings and cried that her husband was trying to throw her over. She called for help and Penny ran into the flat. A minute or so later Mrs. Penny brought the child, who was unconscious, to her flat and said, "He has thrown Joan over."

It was stated that Penny was found on the ground near the child also injured. In Penny's pocket was found a letter addressed to his wife which said:

Darling, forgive me. It is the only way. I do wish you could come with me. You seemed determined not to. . . . You are the only thing I ever loved, and now I have brought you to this. If I could see any hope in the future for our little ducky I would leave her, but I do not. There would be something left out of the rest, I hope, to set you up. . . . Your broken-hearted Daddy.

#### "THERE IS NO HOPE."

In a letter addressed to his mother he wrote:

It has been coming for a year or more—perhaps truly I may say for three years. I have fought and schemed and struggled unceasingly, but now there is no more hope.

No one will ever know the tortures I have gone through, the ceaseless anxiety and degradation due to poverty. . . . It is a ghastly existence in this post-war world. They have drained me dry, money-lenders, income-tax people, solicitors with their costs and fees, and so on, and now I am sure certain. I was not meant to get free in this life. . . .

My most dreadful problem has been the fate of my two dear ones. If I could have provided for them or seen any chance of their surviving I would have gone alone. But there is no one.

The inquest was adjourned.

Figure 3.1: Article of 56 lines, Daily Mail (2 May 1923), p. 4.



### *Extent of Reporting by Newspaper*

According to Table 3.16 the *Manchester Guardian*, closely followed by the *Daily Mail*, reported on the highest number of cases of paternal child killing, and both newspapers published the most amount of articles, as shown by Table 3.17. The newspaper coverage of cases was also analysed according to how many newspaper articles reported on each stage of the case from the occurrence of the crime to the sentencing of the defendant. The most popular stage in the reporting of cases of paternal child killing in the period 1919 to 1929 was after the coroner's inquest, followed by the initial discovery of the killing (see Table 3.18). The coroner's inquest provided the opportunity, where possible, for the victim to be identified, the cause of death to be established, and in cases of murder, manslaughter, and neglect to determine who was responsible for the victim's death. Before the trial the inquest provided the most amount of information from which newspapers could construct articles about the case. As was highlighted in the previous chapter the First World War impacted the number of articles written about cases of paternal child killing and this change was still evident in the 1920s. Although cases of paternal child killing in the period 1919 to 1929 received more attention in the national press than during the First World War, it was not to the extent of the pre-war period. Evidently newspaper journalists had realised that they did not have to rely on news of violent crime quite so heavily as they had done. Other crime news, such as gang- and motor-related crimes, celebrity gossip, current and world affairs, and sports news were able to hold reader attention just as much as violent crimes.

<b>Name of Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Cases</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	33
<i>Daily Mail</i>	52
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	30
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	54
<i>The Times</i>	43
<i>The Observer</i>	13
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	11

Table 3.16: Number of cases reported on by each newspaper, 1919-1929

<b>Name of Newspaper</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	45
<i>Daily Mail</i>	85
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	47
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	101
<i>The Times</i>	75
<i>The Observer</i>	13
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	13

*Table 3.17: Total number of articles published in each newspaper, 1919-1929*

<b>Stage in Reporting</b>	<b>Number of Articles</b>
Discovery of the killing	83
Coroner's inquest	103
Police court hearing	75
Trial in progress	27
Trial verdict	72
After the verdict	20

*Table 3.18: Amount of newspaper coverage per stage in the reporting process, 1919-1929*

#### **4. Editorial Devices**

This section examines some of the editorial devices employed to construct the narratives about the cases of paternal child killing being reported on. Such devices include the headlines and sub-headlines of the articles, discussion of elements of the crime, perpetual novelty, sensationalism, and photographs. In the previous chapter it was demonstrated that the First World War changed the way newspapers reported cases of paternal child killing to the public. Lengthy descriptions of wounds, the blood of victims, and weapons were eliminated in the reports due to space constraints but also because there was a lack of appetite for gory details during a war which produced so much gore itself. This had lasting effects on the way in which newspapers reported on paternal child killing in the post-war period as is shown in this part of the analysis.

##### *Headlines and Sub-headlines*

Of the 382 articles pertaining to cases on this sub-sample, 93 per cent used a specific headline to mark out the case from the rest of the articles on the newspaper page (see Table

3.19). In comparison to the first sub-sample, the use of a general headline to discuss numerous cases relating to crime or the assize courts of a certain geographic area, was rarely employed. The use of a specific headline, usually accompanied by a sub-headline, became the norm in newspaper reporting. Additionally, the frequency of articles in which no headline or just a sub-headline was used (usually part of a longer article on 'local news') diminished in the 1920s. The layout of newspapers made it easier to identify individual news stories in comparison with some newspaper coverage of cases earlier in the period 1900 to July 1914.

Type of Headline	Number of Articles
Specific headline	358
Sub-headline of specific headline	287
General headline	4
Sub-headline of general headline	4
No headline	14
Sub-headline	4

*Table 3.19: Breakdown of headlines and sub-headlines of each article, 1919-1929*

The most common features of headlines and sub-headlines were the victim(s), the crime committed, and the relationship of the accused to the victim(s) (see Table 3.20). The frequency of these features broadly reflects their usage in the headlines and sub-headlines used in the previous two sub-samples. Although the First World War affected the amount of space given to cases of violent crime, such as paternal child killing, it did not have much of an impact on the headlines and sub-headlines used to signpost the cases. That the content of these formulaic headlines and sub-headlines did not change drastically over a 30-year period suggests that newspaper journalists and editors thought that provision of these specific details would ensure reader engagement with the articles.

Headline Feature	Number of Headlines
Location of the crime	92
Occupation of accused	23
Crime committed	180
Victim(s)	194
Relationship of accused to victim(s)	173
Punishment	39
Insanity	39
Means of killing	113
Descriptions of the crime	85

*Table 3.20: Most common features of headlines and sub-headlines, 1919-1929*

The final part of the headline and sub-headline analysis examines the language used in the headlines. The majority of the headlines and sub-headlines employed matter-of-fact language to convey basic details of the case, such as the crime the father was charged with, the relationship of the accused to the victim, and the punishment of the defendant. As with the language used in the headlines and sub-headlines of the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample, the words ‘mystery’, ‘tragedy’ and ‘drama’ were used frequently to convey a sense of heightened dramatics. These nouns were used in conjunction with other details of the cases, such as the location of the killing. Unlike the headlines and sub-headlines used for the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample in which these terms seemed to be used indiscriminately, these descriptions were reserved for stranger cases. For instance, the case of William John Grant and Alice Maude White who were convicted for the neglect of Grant’s sixteen-year old daughter, Connie, in 1919. It was determined during the coroner’s inquest that Connie had died from neglect and that Alice White had buried her body under the kitchen floor in a panic. The first article found on the case referred to it as the ‘Kitchen Burial Mystery’ and many of the newspaper articles used some form of this detail in the headline, such as ‘New Facts of the Skeleton Drama’, ‘Skeleton Mystery Takes New Turn’, and ‘Hidden Skeleton Drama’.

Those headlines and sub-headlines which discussed the sanity of the paternal child killer used a mixture of legal phrasing, medical terminology, and lay understandings. Phrases

such as 'Insane Father's Crime', 'Murder By Insane Father', and 'Guilty But Insane' were simplistic, legal interpretations of the killings which announced in plain terms that the paternal child killer was not sane at the time of the crimes. Phrases such 'Father Unsuccessfully Pleads "Delusions"', however, employed a medical understanding of the paternal child killer's mental ill health. Other headlines and sub-headlines referenced the reason why the paternal child killer in question had suffered a mental breakdown, such as 'Mind Unhinged By Trade Losses' and 'Reason For Rich Man's Mad Act'. Both of these phrases were used in the newspaper coverage of the same case and gave a tantalising glimpse into the case.

### *Elements of the Killing*

As with the previous sub-samples a variety of different means of killing were reported, mainly of a violent nature. The most prominent method in this time period was cutting the throat of the child, followed by a gunshot wound, drowning, a head injury, strangling, and poisoning. Additionally there were a number of less violent, more indirect methods of killing, such as neglect, lack of medical attention, and starvation. Clive Emsley states that extreme violence and the use of firearms were considered to be un-English and the press reinforced these beliefs.<sup>471</sup> Yet, this does not appear to be the case in this sub-sample, the use of guns by paternal child killers was not commented upon. Before the war it was rare for criminals to carry guns but there was a growing concern that after the war there would be an increase in the number of armed crimes.<sup>472</sup> This was evident in the number of fathers who used guns, usually their service rifle, to kill their children

Unlike the first sub-sample, in which graphic accounts of the wounds inflicted by fathers on their children were detailed in the newspaper coverage, the descriptions of

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<sup>471</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England*, p. 117.

<sup>472</sup> H. Shore, 'Criminality and Englishness in the Aftermath: The Racecourse wars of the 1920s', *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2011), p. 493.

wounds during this period were restricted mainly to adult victims, such as the mother of the children, and the father, if he committed suicide. The First World War made journalists and editors less likely to include graphic details of wounds as readers became more sensitive to this kind of material. Most of the descriptions of child victims in this sub-sample were concise and briefly described the way in which the child was killed without going into the extreme detail of the first sub-sample. For example, Roderick McKenzie shot his daughter 'through the lungs', William Howes stunned and then threw his daughter into a pond, and Albert Banks shot his daughter in the head and chest.<sup>473</sup> There was not the same appetite as in the pre-war period for highly detailed descriptions about the wounds sustained by murder victims, much less those who were children. Shani D'Cruze argues that the middle class, who were growing in number and whose dominant culture was coloured by social respectability, did not want to read these graphic descriptions of murder victims.<sup>474</sup> While the findings for this sub-sample, and the sub-sample for the period late 1914 to 1918, broadly support D'Cruze's contention, D'Cruze seems to overlook working class aspirations for 'respectability' and the fact that many of their loved ones will have perished in the First World War.

The descriptions of a more detailed nature were reserved for cases in which the child died from a less direct means of killing, such as starvation or neglect. In the descriptions of the bodies of the child victims of both Arthur Cuttell and William Chattaway the reader learnt that these parents had allowed their children to live in terrible conditions and had physically neglected them. Cuttell's daughter was 'covered with vermin' whilst Chattaway's was 'reduced almost to a skeleton' and was a 'mass of sores'.<sup>475</sup> The gruesome

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<sup>473</sup> 'Officer and Daughter Shot', *The Times* (22 August 1921), p. 5, and 'Girl's Body in a Pond', *The Times* (3 June 1920), p. 13, and 'Sleeping Women Shot', *Daily Mirror* (15 August 1928), p. 5.

<sup>474</sup> S. D'Cruze, 'Intimacy, Professionalism and Domestic Homicide in Interwar Britain: The Case of Buck Ruxton', *Women's History Review*, 16 (2007), p. 702.

<sup>475</sup> 'Ilford Baby's Death', *The Times* (27 August 1919), p. 7 and 'Invalid Daughter Starved', *The Times* (8 July 1922), p. 8.

descriptions of victims who had died from an indirect means of killing may have been permissible since the father did not physically assault the child.

### *Perpetual Novelty*

In comparison with the first two sub-samples, during the period 1919 to 1929 the language of perpetual novelty changed. In the first two sub-samples it was much more common for newspaper journalists to discuss a case of paternal child killing as if no such instance had occurred before. In this sub-sample the language of perpetual novelty changed from shock to mystery with many cases being referred to as a 'mystery' or 'mysterious'. A case of paternal child killing with any element of mystery about it became almost like a weekly murder mystery story, to encourage readers to come back to the newspaper to see how the case would be resolved. This makes sense given that reading murder stories was a preoccupation of the interwar working and middle classes.<sup>476</sup> It also filled a gap in the newspaper reports that the sensational accounts of the murdered bodies would have occupied. In reference to the case of William Grant, who was convicted for the neglect of his daughter whose body was found buried under the kitchen floor, one headline read 'Kitchen Burial Mystery'.<sup>477</sup> It was a 'mystery' because the police could not at first work out how she had died or how her body came to be under the kitchen floor. The focus on the mysterious element of paternal child killing reflected the fact that most newspaper articles were printed immediately after the coroner's inquest, where parts of the mystery were solved.

### *Sensationalism and Public Reaction*

John Carter Wood argues that the 1920s was a golden age for press spectacles due to increasing literacy, advances in printing technology, and expanding consumer

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<sup>476</sup> D'Cruze, 'Intimacy, Professionalism and Domestic Homicide', p. 701.

<sup>477</sup> 'Kitchen Burial Mystery', *Daily Mail* (1 August 1919), p. 3.

opportunities.<sup>478</sup> However, there were no cases of paternal child killing in the period 1919 to 1929 that were particularly sensationalized, especially in comparison with the first sub-sample. In this sub-sample cases of paternal child killing which received elevated levels of newspaper coverage did so for two reasons: because there was sympathy for the father or because there was contempt for him. Sympathy can be seen in the coverage of the case of Archibald Crockford who was found guilty of the murder of his son. He attempted to plead insanity but was found sane and sentenced to death. Crockford fought in the final year of the First World War, signing up when he was only fifteen years old. It was repeatedly stated that Crockford had tried desperately to find employment to support the mother of his child but had struggled to do so. The *Manchester Guardian* stated that ‘this particular case makes a special appeal to our sympathies’ because the ‘criminal is the victim of social conditions for which we are all more or less responsible’, alluding to Crockford’s experiences in the First World War and the ensuing economic recession.<sup>479</sup> The members of the Manchester Evening Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends sent a petition for the reprieve of Crockford’s sentence to the Home Secretary which was ‘well signed by the public’.<sup>480</sup> Because the evidence of his guilt was clear-cut, and there was no chance for him to avoid the death sentence via incarceration in an asylum, there was more incentive for the public to plead for his reprieve.

A great amount of sympathy was also given to Albert Davies, who killed his terminally ill son. The judge stated that it was a ‘heartrending story of a father...driven to distraction’ by his child’s illness.<sup>481</sup> The case provoked conversations about a parent’s right to end a sick child’s life and concern about the extent of this practice. The *Daily Mail* commented that this case could ‘be very dangerous’ if it was ‘regarded in any way as a

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<sup>478</sup> J. Carter Wood, *“The Most Remarkable Woman in England”: Poison, Celebrity, and the Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2012), p. 68.

<sup>479</sup> ‘Starving Father’s Crime’, *Manchester Guardian* (4 July 1922), p. 11.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>481</sup> ‘A Distracted Father’, *Daily Mail* (22 October 1927), p. 9.



precedent'.<sup>482</sup> Further, the newspaper advocated that 'human life is sacred and must always be treated as such' and that the 'whole structure on which society is founded' would be undermined if any 'loophole to this doctrine were permitted'.<sup>483</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, on the other hand, who wrote an editorial on the outcome of this case, suggested that there should be a new law created to permit the death of 'any person who is in a hopeless position as regards life and death'.<sup>484</sup> When Davies returned home he was 'cheered by several hundred people', indicating that the majority of public opinion was on the side of a father deeply troubled by his child's ill health.<sup>485</sup>

Cases which received increased newspaper attention did not necessarily arouse public sympathy. Some cases were received negatively by the general public and this was commented upon by the press. Albert Burrows murdered his two children, as well as another child who was not his, and his wife.<sup>486</sup> On arrival at his trial at the police court he was greeted by 'considerable hooting' and a woman even attempted to 'strike him'.<sup>487</sup> When leaving the court it was amid a 'babel of protesting hoots and groans from the crowded portions of the court'.<sup>488</sup> The circumstances surrounding Burrows's case do not make it difficult to determine why public reaction was so negative to this case. The woman he murdered was not legally his wife, though he claimed she was, his children were illegitimate, a factor proposed by the newspapers to be the explanation behind the crimes, and when concern was raised about the children's whereabouts, Burrows lied, maintaining that he had placed them in a Children's Home. Additionally Burrows showed no remorse or concern about murdering his children, their mother, and another child.

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<sup>482</sup> 'The Sacredness of Human Life', *Daily Mail* (24 October 1927), p. 10.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>484</sup> 'Sir A. Conan Doyle Suggests a New Law', *Daily Express* (24 October 1927), p. 11.

<sup>485</sup> 'Dying Child's Agony', *Daily Mail* (24 October 1927), p. 9.

<sup>486</sup> It was later revealed that the woman he murdered was actually his common law wife, and that his wife to whom he was legally married was still living.

<sup>487</sup> 'Four Murder Charges', *Daily Mail* (21 June 1923), p. 13.

<sup>488</sup> 'Pit Murder Charges', *Manchester Guardian* (21 June 1923), p. 14.

The case of Pierre de Crouzet-Rayssac also aroused a negative reaction from the 'whole city of Toulouse'.<sup>489</sup> De Crouzet-Rayssac murdered the child of a family servant with whom he had had an illicit relationship and the motivation for killing the child was to avoid the consequences of this relationship. This kind of case was newsworthy for English national newspapers because it highlighted a foreign instance of a violent crime as well as one that involved a member of the French aristocracy. It provided an opportunity for English newspapers to comment on French society and culture. Although English society itself was heavily stratified by class in the early twentieth century, the article in *The Sunday Times* drew attention to the snobbery that characterised the case: wealthy residents were jammed into the courtroom alongside 'roughly-clad peasants' and 'agitated townsfolk', inflaming all the 'old antagonisms' between cottage and castle.<sup>490</sup> All four of these cases demonstrate that there had to be a perceived level of public interest in order to warrant such an increased level of newspaper attention. An interesting court case or mysterious element was no longer enough to justify extensive newspaper coverage of a case of paternal child killing.

### *Inclusion of Images*

In fourteen cases (16 per cent) a photograph, or a selection of photographs, were included in the newspaper coverage which totalled 42 images. There were no other types of images included in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample. The subjects of the photographs included the defendant entering court, in court, or a headshot, the victim(s), witnesses of the crime, the location of the crime, and the judge presiding over the case (see Table 3.21).<sup>491</sup> The subjects of the photographs did not differ to those in the newspaper coverage

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<sup>489</sup> 'Sentence on a Nobleman', *The Sunday Times* (28 October 1928), p. 18.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>491</sup> In each category an open-ended sub-category of 'other' was included for pictures which did not fit into these sub-categories. For those coded as personal this included a witness and a photograph of Arthur Conan Doyle. For those coded as institutional, 'other' images included the offender entering the court, a doctor who testified at the inquest, the offender leaving the court, and the mother of the victim in court.

of cases in the first and second sub-samples. The majority of the photographs were printed separate to the article they related (see Table 3.22) suggesting that the photograph served as a device to draw readers' attention to the article elsewhere in the newspaper. The only newspapers to print photographs of paternal child killers in this sub-sample were the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Mail*. Given that these newspapers promoted the use of photographic journalism this is not surprising (see Table 3.23). It is surprising, however, that use of photographs did not increase during the period 1919 to 1929 and that there were more photographs included in the first sub-sample relative to the number of cases.

Subject of Image	Sub-Category of the Image	Total Number
Personal	Offender(s)	9
	Victim(s)	8
	Family	3
	Other	6
Institutional	Offender in prison	0
	Offender with policeman	4
	Offender in court	2
	Police	0
	Judge	1
	Lawyer	1
	Other	4
Environmental	Location of crime	3
	Home of victim	1
	Home of offender	0
	Other	0

Table 3.21: Subjects and sub-categories of the images used in the newspaper coverage, 1919-1929

Placement in Newspaper	Total Number
Accompanies article	10
In picture gallery section	8
Separate to article	14
Picture only	4
Front cover	5

Table 3.22: Placement of image in the newspaper coverage, 1919-1929

Newspaper	Total Number
<i>Daily Express</i>	1
<i>Daily Mail</i>	15
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	26
<i>The Manchester Guardian</i>	0
<i>The Observer</i>	0
<i>The Times</i>	0
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	0

Table 3.23: Number of images per newspaper, 1919-1929

The inclusion of photographs in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers was undoubtedly motivated to provoke sympathy in the reader. In the case of Albert Davies, the photograph (see Figure 3.2) shows him dressed in his army uniform, suggesting that it was an official army photograph. He looks handsome, smart, and respectable. He does not look like a ‘typical’ murderer. The photograph served to bolster the sympathetic tone of the article it accompanied. Albert Davies reportedly killed his daughter because she was dying in extreme pain and he could not bear to witness it. It was also mentioned that he lied about his age when he joined the army in 1915 and he had been overwhelmed with misery since his discharge due to the illness of his wife and child, adding further reasons to find sympathy for him.



Figure 3.2: Photograph of Albert Davies, *Daily Mail* (October 24 1927).

## 5. Understandings of Mental Illness

The final section of this chapter examines the way in which the sanity of the paternal child killers in this sub-sample was represented in the newspaper coverage. Newspaper accounts of paternal child killing allow access to a range of different understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. They also demonstrate how newspapers selected and presented evidence relating to mental illness and criminal culpability for readers to understand. Trial transcripts from the Old Bailey were not available for the period 1919 to 1929 but insights made in the first chapter using the trial transcripts for the period 1900 to 1913 were applied to this chapter. Analysis of the Old Bailey trial transcripts revealed that journalists selected the evidence given by medical experts based on whether it would be understandable to a general readership. Medical evidence was usually edited down in the newspapers to whether the medical expert thought the accused was insane at the time of the crime. The analysis also showed that journalists did not always include medical evidence in the newspaper articles despite at least one expert testifying on the subject. Although journalists did not record verbatim the testimony of medical experts in the newspaper articles, what they did include is just as revealing. In the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample in which the defendant's mental health was in question, more space was given to their testimony than in the first sub-sample.

Although the mental illness of paternal child killers was scarcely discussed in the newspaper coverage of cases in the previous sub-sample, the mental health of paternal child killers once more took on prominence in the period 1919 to 1929. In 59 cases (67 per cent) the mental health of the perpetrator was mentioned in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample. This includes the alleged perpetrator alluding to some form of mental illness, witness testimony on their mental wellbeing, invocation of the insanity plea by the counsel for the defence during a trial, and medical testimony on their sanity. This section looks at

personal accounts of mental breakdown, lay evidence, the testimony of medical experts, and legal understandings, as well as physical and non-physical causes of mental illness.

The extent to which experiences of the First World War influenced the way in which mental illness was discussed is also determined in this chapter. Both Fiona Reid and Mathew Thomson question the extent to which the war had an impact on medical definitions and understandings of mental illness.<sup>492</sup> Reid argues that some medical attitudes did shift during the war but claims there was no linear progression in terms of medical or psychological understanding of mental illness more generally.<sup>493</sup> Edgar Jones contends that shell shock was not viewed as a novel disorder but as a variant of disorders seen in the pre-war period, such as railway spine or neurasthenia.<sup>494</sup> Similarly, Tracey Loughran argues that doctors drew on established bodies of knowledge about nervous and mental illness allowed doctors to recognise the emotional origins of shell shock at the outbreak of the First World War.<sup>495</sup> Although she concedes that shell shock marked an important moment in the emergence of distinct disciplines of psychology and psychiatry, this did not involve a radical departure from pre-war concepts of mental health.<sup>496</sup> In the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample there is a perceptible shift in the language used by lay witnesses, medical experts, and legal professionals. Theories and definitions of mental illness discussed in the newspaper coverage of the first sub-sample are evident but new terminology concerning mental breakdown is also apparent. Perhaps in response to the significant number of psychological casualties in the First World War, newspaper journalists felt more comfortable

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<sup>492</sup> F. Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock: Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914 -1930* (Bloomsbury: London, 2010), p. 95 and M. Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity Culture, and Health in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford University Press; Oxford, 2006), p. 183.

<sup>493</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>494</sup> E. Jones, 'Shell Shock at Maghull and the Maudsley: Models of Psychological Medicine in the United Kingdom', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 65 (2010), p. 394.

<sup>495</sup> T. Loughran, 'Shell-Shock and Psychological Medicine in First World War Britain', *Social History of Medicine*, 22 (2009), p. 83.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

discussing mental health in-depth and more certain that their readers would have a better understanding of the information they were presented with.

### *Personal Account of Breakdowns in Mental Health*

Many fathers provided testimony on their own sanity at some point after the occurrence of the crime or prior to their trial. Many personal accounts used colloquial expressions to describe their state of mind prior to and at the time of the crime. John Breeze claimed that he was 'off [his] chump' when he murdered his children and that he 'must have been mad'.<sup>497</sup> Other men specifically attributed their crime and their breakdown in mental health to domestic problems. James Leah stated that he was 'not responsible' for the murder of his daughter because he had been 'weighed down with trouble' since his wife left him.<sup>498</sup> Percy Johnson meanwhile claimed he killed his son 'in a mad moment through worry of family troubles' which, after further elaboration in the newspaper coverage, were to do with family illness.<sup>499</sup> Reference to their own mental health suggests that these paternal child killers were aware of what the implications of invoking a breakdown in mental health would be. At the very least if these men claimed that their mental wellbeing had a bearing on their actions in killing their children this would prompt an investigation into their mental health, and possibly prevent being sentenced to death.

In cases in which the father committed suicide, personal accounts of mental illness can also be found in suicide notes. They provide an insight into the state of mind of paternal child killers prior to killing their children, the reasons they ascribed to their state of mind, and how this led them to kill their children. Albert Sims wrote a number of letters explaining why he murdered his wife and son, before he committed suicide. To his mother-in-law he wrote that he was sorry he killed his wife and child but he didn't want them to suffer after

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<sup>497</sup> 'Triple Murder Charge', *Daily Mail* (5 January 1926), p. 7.

<sup>498</sup> 'Death Sentence on Cheshire Farmer', *Manchester Guardian* (28 October 1926), p. 10.

<sup>499</sup> 'Tragic Family', *The Observer* (28 October 1923), p. 15.

his death and that he was 'driven to it' by others that had tried to 'get [him] the sack'.<sup>500</sup>

Then, in a letter addressed to the coroner, he wrote that he was 'at present insane, driven to it with pain and suffering trying to do an honest day's work on bad feet and constitution'.<sup>501</sup>

In both of these letters Sims proposed that not only was he insane at the time he committed the crimes but that his mental illness was accelerated by his concern that he was going to lose his job due to ill health and other people plotting against him.

Most accounts of mental wellbeing provided by paternal child killers who committed suicide used vague terminology. In a letter to his sister Frederick Turner 'wonder[ed] whether [he was] going out of [his] mind'.<sup>502</sup> Similarly, William Burgess wrote in a note to his brother that he was 'mad'.<sup>503</sup> Neither letter, as recorded in the newspaper coverage, went into much detail as to why these two men believed they were mad. Turner stated that he had experienced the 'most funny and silly thoughts' which seems like a fairly mundane indicator of insanity but nonetheless demonstrates how the slightest of change in 'normal' behaviour could lead men to believe they were insane.<sup>504</sup>

### *Lay Evidence*

Lay evidence on the defendant's sanity was given by several different types of people; a spouse or partner, family members, friends, and neighbours. Very broadly speaking their testimony, as reported in the newspaper coverage, focussed on whether they noticed anything out of the ordinary about the perpetrator, the type of mental illness he was suffering from, and what they thought caused their mental breakdown. As with the first sub-sample, most lay witnesses testified on physical indicators of mental illness and provided observations on the defendant's behaviour prior to them killing their children. This is not

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<sup>500</sup> 'Four Persons Shot Dead', *The Times* (22 April 1929), p. 11.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>502</sup> 'Triple Gas Tragedy', *The Sunday Times* (4 February 1923), p. 15.

<sup>503</sup> 'Alleged Triple Murder and Suicide', *The Observer* (18 February 1923), p. 15.

<sup>504</sup> 'Triple Gas Tragedy', *The Sunday Times* (4 February 1923), p. 15.



surprising since they were readily accessible and visible to a lay witness. Victor Robinson's wife noticed that he was 'strange in his manner'.<sup>505</sup> A witness who saw Albert Banks said he was 'very near the edge of a mental breakdown'.<sup>506</sup> Depression also featured strongly in lay evidence and a state of depression was often linked to another event in the paternal child killer's life, as is discussed further in this chapter. Alexander Filson's friend stated that he had 'suffered from deep depression since the death of his wife' a year previous.<sup>507</sup> William Holden's wife said that for six or seven weeks before the child's death, her husband had been 'depressed and run down'.<sup>508</sup> Depression was widely referred to in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample, too, showing its continued use as a cause of mental breakdown.

In comparison with the first sub-sample, journalists did not devote as much space to lay testimony or attribute as much of their evidence to lay sources. There was a stronger focus on medical evidence or blending lay evidence into the foundation of the article. Because the Old Bailey trial transcripts were not available it was difficult to determine where some pieces of information were learnt, either on arrest, at the coroner's inquest, at trial, or by interviews with witnesses. Whilst this is frustrating, it demonstrates how much of a premium was placed on certain pieces of evidence and those who gave it. In the first sub-sample the testimony of lay witnesses was given more space in the articles, by the 1920s it was medical witnesses.

### *The Testimony of Medical Experts*

Newspaper reports on thirteen cases featured the testimony of a single medical expert. In one case the testimony of two medical experts was reported and in one cases the evidence of four medical experts was reported in the newspaper coverage. In a further four cases it

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<sup>505</sup> 'The Levenshulme Tragedy', *Manchester Guardian* (24 September 1921), p. 6.

<sup>506</sup> 'Double Murder Charge', *The Times* (15 August 1928), p. 9.

<sup>507</sup> 'Tragic End of a Family', *The Observer* (16 January 1927), p. 9.

<sup>508</sup> 'Child's Death in Sea at Blackpool', *Manchester Guardian* (8 September 1925), p. 10.

was reported that medical expertise was consulted to determine the defendant's state of mind but no individual practitioner was named. From Table 3.24 it can be seen that the use of medical testimony in this period did not always result in a sympathetic verdict, i.e. a finding of insanity. From the available information, paternal child killers were as likely to be found guilty of murder but insane as they were to be found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. This is borne out further in Table 3.25 which details the punishments of men at whose trial medical testimony was given. It is possible that medical testimony was given in other trials but was not commented upon by the journalist, as was the case in the first sub-sample. Indeed, as Joel Eigen argues, there was no obvious relationship between rates of medical participation and acquittal.<sup>509</sup> Unfortunately, there was not enough evidence in the newspaper coverage to determine whether the medical expert testified for the defence or the prosecution, so the likelihood of an expert finding a defendant sane or insane based on who they were testifying for cannot be ascertained.

Verdict	Number of Cases
Guilty of murder	5
Guilty of murder but insane	7
Guilty of manslaughter	1
Not guilty of murder	1
Unidentified	5
Total	14

*Table 3.24: The verdict of cases in which medical testimony was given on an individual's sanity, 1919-1929*

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<sup>509</sup> J. Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock: Defending the Diagnosis, 1760-1913* (The Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2016), p. 26.

Punishment	Number of Cases	
	Medical Testimony Reported	No Medical Testimony Reported
Death, reprieved	1	0
Death	4	4
6 months imprisonment	0	1
5 years penal servitude	1	1
7 years penal servitude	0	1
Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	7	8
Unidentified	7	0
Total	12	15

*Table 3.25: The outcomes of trials according to punishment and the use of medical testimony in cases in which insanity was invoked, 1919-1929*

As set out at the beginning of this section, newspapers selected pieces of medical testimony to suit the needs of a general readership. In the period 1900 to July 1914 this meant condensing the testimony into one or two sentences detailing whether the defendant was thought to be insane or not. In the newspaper coverage of cases in the sub-sample for the period 1919 to 1929 more evidence was included about what the medical expert thought the cause of the mental illness was and why they had arrived at this judgement. In light of the First World War and the increasing visibility of those with a mental illness this might be expected. In comparison with the medical testimony included in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample less space was spent dwelling on legal understandings of insanity and more on the socio-economic factors which were thought to have led to the crime and mental breakdown. Unlike the first sub-sample, medical testimony did not resemble lay evidence and was differentiated by more technical terminology.

Although it was identified in the newspaper coverage that several of the men in the sub-sample suffered psychologically due to their experiences in the First World War this was not a feature of medical testimony given during their trials. This questions the extent to which war trauma was thought to have had a lasting impact or whether medical experts relied on tried and tested diagnoses of mental illness more likely to lead to a successful insanity plea. Perhaps in response to fears that war-induced mental illness was being used to

mitigate violent crimes medical experts steered away from this controversial topic. The fact that it was not reported that medical experts referenced the army service of ex-soldiers who killed their children feeds into the Ministry of Pensions' attempt to limit their economic responsibilities for mental illness in ex-servicemen.

Attention was paid to the type of mental illness the expert thought the defendant was suffering from, the reasons they arrived at this conclusion, and the consequences of such a mental illness. In comparison with the medical testimony reported in the newspaper coverage relating to cases in the first sub-sample, there was more of an appetite for in-depth medical testimony, not just whether the defendant was insane according to legal requirements. The medical officer of Brixton prison, William East, gave evidence for the defence of George Penny. He was of the opinion that Penny was 'suffering from confusional insanity at the time of the act'.<sup>510</sup> Another medical expert, in agreement with East, said that Penny was 'suffering from exhaustion psychosis' and explained that this was a condition of the brain which, if untreated, became confusional insanity.<sup>511</sup> Confusional insanity was a form of exhaustion psychosis, characterised by anxiety, restlessness and forgetfulness.<sup>512</sup> Although this was not a new diagnosis in 1923, it was a new diagnosis in terms of the whole sample looked at for this thesis. In the first sub-sample diagnoses by medical experts in mental health were consistent throughout the period, and older concepts of mental illness were adhered to. In the 1920s, not only did medical experts feel more confident in using medical phraseology in the courtroom but journalists felt more comfortable including them in their newspaper reports, reflecting a greater acceptance of medical ways of thinking more generally and psychiatry in society specifically.

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<sup>510</sup> 'Schoolmaster's Plea', *The Times* (7 June 1923), p. 16.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>512</sup> K. Bogaert, 'The Difficulty in Diagnosis: Shell Shock and the Case of Private Dennis R', <http://activehistory.ca/2018/02/the-difficulty-in-diagnosis-shell-shock-and-the-case-of-private-dennis-r/> [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2018].

Medical testimony as reported in newspapers revealed that the boundaries of what constituted mental illness were contested and uncertain even in medical evidence. Janet Weston argues that these differences were evidence of flexibility within understandings of mental illness, meaning that imprecise definitions made the concept of insanity very broad and, therefore, applicable to a multitude of circumstances.<sup>513</sup> This can be seen in discussions of epilepsy in several of the cases in this sub-sample. The status of epilepsy as a form, or indicator, of mental illness was contested in the late nineteenth century and this continued into the twentieth.<sup>514</sup> At the trial of Kenneth Perry in 1926 medical evidence was given that the prisoner was an epileptic, and, although ‘apparently normal’ after the crime, he claimed he had no recollection of it.<sup>515</sup> He was found guilty of murder but insane and no other evidence on his sanity was recorded in the newspaper coverage.<sup>516</sup> Similarly, one of the medical experts at the trial of John Jones came to the conclusion that Jones suffered from a ‘disease of the mind’ which ‘might be described as epileptic’.<sup>517</sup> The medical expert at the trial of Archibald Crockford stated that there was no history of epilepsy or fits or intemperance, indicating that these were factors taken into account when considering a defendant’s sanity.<sup>518</sup>

The debate over what constituted mental illness and criminal culpability was reflected in the conflicting testimony given by different medical experts. As with the first sub-sample, the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers demonstrated that there was a variety of different medical witnesses called in to give evidence on a defendant’s mental health. The most commonly called upon expert was the prison medical officer, whose testimony was usually reported in the newspaper coverage succinctly (see Table 3.26 for a

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<sup>513</sup> Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System and Sexual Crimes*, p. 16.

<sup>514</sup> J. Stirling, *Representing Epilepsy: Myth and Matter* (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2012), p. 67.

<sup>515</sup> ‘Insane Man Murders His Children’, *Manchester Guardian* (20 November 1926), p. 12.

<sup>516</sup> ‘Father Surrenders to Police’, *Manchester Guardian* (4 September 1926), p. 14.

<sup>517</sup> ‘Murder in a Dream State’, *Daily Mail* (18 June 1929), p. 9.

<sup>518</sup> ‘“Infinite Sorrow That These Things Can Be”’, *Manchester Guardian* (27 June 1922), p. 9.

full breakdown of the medical experts whose testimony was reported in the newspaper coverage). At the trial of John Jones, who murdered his daughter, both a prison doctor and a ‘specialist in mental diseases’ gave evidence on his sanity. It was put forward for Jones’s defence that he murdered his daughter in a dream state. The prison doctor questioned this theory because he believed that if Jones had ‘committed murder in a dream state he would on recovering his sense have expressed horror, or at least surprise’.<sup>519</sup> The specialist in mental diseases, however, believed that Jones murdered his family in ‘an epileptic dream state somewhat akin to somnambulism’.<sup>520</sup> The difference between the two testimonies suggests that the specialist employed more complicated terminology in order to appear more certain about the dream state theory and emphasise his position as a specialist in this field.

Title of Medical Expert	Number Reported in the Newspaper Coverage
Prison medical officer	11
Asylum medical superintendent	1
Doctor	3
Medical adviser at a private mental hospital	1
Specialist in mental diseases	1
Unidentified	2
Total	17

*Table 3.26: The number of experts referred to in the newspaper coverage, 1919-1929*

The difference between the content of testimony on mental illness from different medical experts can also be seen in the trial of George Penny. It was not only an asylum superintendent but a doctor from a general hospital, where Penny was admitted after attempting to commit suicide, who gave evidence on Penny’s mental state. In answer to a question about the likelihood of Penny having a ‘hereditary taint’, Dr Levy, a non-specialist, replied that Penny was mentally unstable and predisposed to mental disease.<sup>521</sup> He also added that Penny did not behave abnormally while in hospital, relying on physical indicators of insanity. Levy’s testimony, as reported in the newspaper coverage, used language more

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>521</sup> ‘Head Master’s Murder Trial’, *Manchester Guardian* (7 June 1923), p. 3.

akin to that of a lay witness and seems outdated when compared to the evidence given by other medical witnesses during this time period. That Levy was questioned about the hereditary nature of Penny's mental illness demonstrates that some medical understandings still relied on biological theories of insanity. It also implies that doctors without specialist training in mental health fell back on older concepts.

In some cases medical evidence on a defendant's sanity was edited in the newspaper reports to the bare essentials: only stating whether the defendant was believed to be insane or had shown signs of insanity but not what these signs were or what form that insanity took. For example, the medical officer of Strangeways Prison considered that Walter Green was 'insane and had been insane for some time'.<sup>522</sup> He thought Green's mind was 'diseased' so that he did not know right from wrong or know the nature and quality of his act. Similarly, the medical officer of Brixton said that Charles Travis 'showed signs of mental instability' and that he was not a 'normal person mentally'.<sup>523</sup> These highly edited pieces of testimony were in the minority in this sub-sample. More typically, newspapers were willing to give more space to medical testimony on insanity, reflecting a desire for more knowledge on this subject. It also suggests that more interest was taken in the psychological reasons for committing such a crime and subsequently the ensuing conversation about the defendant's responsibility for the crime.

### *Legal Understandings*

The newspaper coverage of paternal child killers thought to be insane also provided evidence of legal understandings of what constituted insanity and responsibility for a crime. In several cases the judge's comments were reported in the newspaper coverage. Their thoughts indicate a number of things about the use of the insanity plea in this period and

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<sup>522</sup> ' "Guilty, But Insane" ', *Manchester Guardian* (17 July 1922), p. 9.

<sup>523</sup> 'Tragedy of a Child's Cry', *Daily Express* (23 July 1924), p. 9 and 'Child's Death by Suffocation', *The Times* (23 July 1924), p. 11.

what made a person legally insane as well as some issues judges had about the invocation of insanity in defence of a violent crime. In four cases the judge expressed concern over whether it was prudent to find the defendant insane (all of whom were different judges). The judge in summing up George Lucas's case said that there was 'a regular practice growing up of holding persons irresponsible for their crimes when they were perfectly responsible, and of saying that people were insane when they did anything horrible'.<sup>524</sup> He went on to say that it was 'a danger to society if people who were prepared to commit crimes of violence had a refuge found for them in the asylums'.<sup>525</sup> This was also evident in the case of Thomas McCarthy in which the judge said that he would accept the jury's verdict of guilty of murder but insane but that in the public interest he wanted to say that there was no evidence on which that verdict could be found.<sup>526</sup> He went on to say that the detainment of McCarthy in a criminal lunatic asylum illustrated a growing trend of the use of an insanity defence based on little evidence but accepted by the jury regardless.<sup>527</sup>

Similarly, the judge of George Penny's case warned the jury that they had to be 'satisfied that Penny was insane in the sense which the law recognises' as there were 'many states of mind which many people would be inclined to speak of as insanity', calling into question the authority of medical experts testifying on insanity.<sup>528</sup> He also said that 'it is perfectly obvious that a man can be sane one minute, insane the next, and quite sane again the third minute', criticising attempts to deem the defendant insane at the time of the crime.<sup>529</sup> The judge called into question what it was that constituted insanity and whether the insanity plea in this case had been put forward unscrupulously. That journalists chose to include these warnings about the improper use of the insanity plea suggests that mental

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<sup>524</sup> 'A Danger to Society', *Daily Mirror* (16 January 1924), p. 2.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>526</sup> 'Judge Rebukes a Murder Jury', *Daily Express* (6 July 1923), p. 5.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>528</sup> 'Murder While "Seeing Red"', *Daily Express* (8 June 1923), p. 9.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*



illness was frequently used to wrongly mitigate criminal culpability and that this was thought to be a widespread practice.

Although not all judges agreed with the defence's invocation of the insanity plea, some did express sympathy for the defendant. Archibald Crockford's defence lawyer contended that Crockford committed the act during temporary insanity, caused by semi-starvation and worry.<sup>530</sup> The judge, however, said that to 'say a person was insane when he was not insane was contrary to the duty of a jury and that it was a doubtful mercy to condemn a sane man to a criminal lunatic asylum', questioning the assumption that incarceration in an asylum was a more lenient punishment.<sup>531</sup> Crockford was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death, although his sentence was later commuted to penal servitude.

Some judges agreed with the invocation of an insanity plea. The judge at the trial of Walter Green, who murdered his son pointed out that the jury had the power to find Green insane, and added that the prison doctor had given strong evidence on Green's sanity.<sup>532</sup> However, the judge also stated that altruism was not a reason for murder (Green had murdered his son because he had suffered from hydrocephalus since birth and he could not bear to see him suffer): if a father killed his children, no matter what the circumstances were, he was guilty of murder; there was no justification or excuse. The judge at the trial of Albert Banks stated that there was abundant evidence on which the jury could find a verdict of insanity.<sup>533</sup> It was stated for his defence that he suffered from a form of melancholia which led to a delusion, taking away all power of right thinking and all knowledge of what was right or wrong.<sup>534</sup> It was reported in *The Times* that a medical adviser to the Burlington Private Mental Hospital gave evidence that Banks had a constitutional weakness which

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<sup>530</sup> 'Murder By Young Father', *The Times* (27 June 1922), p. 5.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>532</sup> ' "Guilty, But Insane" ', *Manchester Guardian* (17 July 1922), p. 9.

<sup>533</sup> 'Minehead Murder Trial', *The Times* (25 October 1928), p. 10.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

rendered him 'liable to break down under any due worry or strain'.<sup>535</sup> The same article also reported that Banks had exhibited signs of nervous breakdown and had been in hospital on two occasions due to his mental health. This strong evidence of Banks' history of mental illness evidently swayed the judge. Overwhelmingly the comments pertaining to the legal point of view of what constituted insanity emphasised the importance of amassing evidence of a history of mental illness prior to committing the crime. Claims that the crime itself was evidence enough of insanity and should mitigate criminal responsibility for the crime was not sufficient.

### *Physical Causes of Mental Illness*

Many of the causes of mental illness identified in the first sub-sample were also invoked in the cases in this sub-sample. Causes of mental illness which were discussed in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample were depression, exposure to heat, illness of both the child and the father, a head injury, a family history of mental illness, delusions, previous incarceration, and suicidal behaviour. It might have been expected that Freud's theory of the unconscious would feature as a cause of mental illness because of his popularity in the early twentieth century, but this was not the case.<sup>536</sup> As Dean Rapp notes, the degree to which the public were fascinated with psychoanalysis has been overstated, which may explain lack of references to it in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>536</sup> Sigmund Freud was an Austrian neurologist who specialised in nervous and brain disorders at the end of the nineteenth century. Freud's most influential theory was that humans have an unconscious in which sexual and aggressive impulses are in constant conflict for supremacy with the defence against them. Freud also developed psychoanalysis, a method for treating mental illness and a theory which explains human behaviour. From the turn of the nineteenth century Freud attracted many followers who were keen to test and develop his theories. He became one of the most influential, and controversial, figures in the history of mental illness and one whose theories have had lasting implications for the treatment of mental illness.

<sup>537</sup> D. Rapp, 'The Early Discovery of Freud by the British General Educated Public, 1912-1919', *The Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 3 (1990), p. 235. See also D. Rapp, 'The Reception of Freud by the British Press: General Interest and Literary Magazines, 1920-1925', *Journal of the Behavioural Sciences*, 24 (1988), pp. 191-210, which discusses the prevalence of psychoanalysis in 43 general

One of the most common causes of insanity referred to in the newspaper coverage was depression. Both working class and middle class men were susceptible to depression. The depression of paternal child killers typically derived from another troubling event in their lives, usually to do with their financial stability. For Captain Pirie his despondency stemmed from his 'inability to provide for his family owing to unemployment'.<sup>538</sup> Similarly, Janus Looijen was 'much depressed' after being dismissed from his job.<sup>539</sup> The link between financial security and depression was also made in the case of Colonel Wray who murdered his son. It was reported that he had 'recently been depressed, although he was not in financial difficulty'.<sup>540</sup> Due to the strong association of fatherhood and masculinity with provision, one of the main understandable reasons for a man to be depressed was because of straitened economic circumstances.

Another factor said to have triggered the depression of paternal child killers was the death of or separation from a loved one. Alexander Filson suffered from a 'deep depression' because of the death of his wife twelve months prior to him murdering his son.<sup>541</sup> His precarious business position and the dread of being separated from his son, who was due to start his RAF training, were also detailed, but it was the grief over the death of his wife which was thought to have 'disturbed his mind'.<sup>542</sup> William Turnstall was 'subject to moody fits of depression' which had become aggravated through an enforced separation from his wife and child due to his poverty.<sup>543</sup> Even in cases in which depression was attributed to another cause, the connection between depression and financial wellbeing was still highlighted.

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interest magazines aimed at primarily a middle class readership. Rapp concludes that although there was a great increase in reportage about Freudianism in 1921, interest peaked in 1925.

<sup>538</sup> 'Airman and His Family', *Daily Mail* (2 October 1924), p. 7.

<sup>539</sup> 'Death Rather Than Relief', *Daily Mail* (13 April 1925), p. 8.

<sup>540</sup> 'Murder During a Brainstorm', *Daily Express* (22 October 1926), p. 2.

<sup>541</sup> 'Tragic End of a Family', *The Observer* (16 January 1927), p. 9.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>543</sup> 'Manchester Assizes', *Manchester Guardian* (8 July 1920), p. 14.

Physical illness, both of the father and his child, was another cause of mental breakdown readily found in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample. In four cases it was reported that a father's physical illness, rather than a psychological one, had caused a breakdown in his mental health. Although these illnesses were not overtly linked to the murder of their children, the illness was mentioned in the biography of the paternal child killer, as a kind of mitigating factor. Robert Kirkwood 'suffered from a spinal infection, which was aggravated...by a fall downstairs', while Kenneth Perry had 'an abscess on the neck' which he 'feared [was] tubercular'.<sup>544</sup> The relationship between physical and mental illness was evident in the newspaper coverage, particularly in the case of Albert Banks. It was noted that a medical expert believed Banks suffered from 'some constitutional weakness which in times of stress affected his nerves'.<sup>545</sup> What this weakness consisted of was not made clear but it was detailed that he suffered from a form of melancholia, which wasn't typically viewed as a constitutional illness but indicates how mental illness was viewed by some as a chronic disease.

It was not always the father's own physical illness that impacted his mental health but that of his child. In the newspaper coverage it was reported that these fathers worried about the health of their children to a damaging extent. In an effort to portray him in a good light, Albert Davies' lawyer claimed that Davies' 'nightly vigils with his sick child might have caused him to become mentally deranged'.<sup>546</sup> Davies was depicted as being driven mad because he worried about the health of his child. Samuel Daw 'pranced around the room in the most terrible agony of mind' when his daughter became ill.<sup>547</sup> It was reported that many of his cousins had died from consumption and he was worried that his daughter would die of the same cause. Other fathers were deeply anxious about the future welfare of their

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<sup>544</sup> 'Murder by a Father', *Daily Express* (29 October 1919), p. 7 and 'Father Surrenders to Police', *Manchester Guardian* (4 September 1926), p. 14.

<sup>545</sup> 'Minehead Murder Trial', *The Times* (25 October 1928), p. 10.

<sup>546</sup> 'Suffering Child's Death', *The Observer* (23 October 1927), p. 17.

<sup>547</sup> 'Man's Dread of Disease', *Daily Mail* (16 April 1929), p. 9.

children. Percy Townsend was 'worried' about his daughter's future because she was disabled.<sup>548</sup> These cases demonstrate the extent to which some fathers internalised their role of protector and the anxiety they felt about their children's welfare. Although murdering a child was the antithesis of protection, it also took the role of protector to its extreme.

Another cause of mental illness that emphasised the central role of physical causes to a breakdown in mental health was a head injury. As with bodily illnesses head injuries were not explicitly related to the father killing his child but were mentioned in a catalogue of events leading up to the crime. Head injuries remained relevant for lay witnesses because they were something tangible onto which a breakdown in mental health could be pinned. Most commonly the head injury had occurred several years prior to the crime as in the case of John Jones who was said to have been 'struck on the head with shrapnel during the war', over a decade prior to the crime.<sup>549</sup> In the case of Sidney Gray, who received 'serious injuries to the head' when serving in the police the inclusion of this detail was used to offer an explanation for the crime because no other motive was known for it.<sup>550</sup>

Family histories of mental illness were also referred to in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases. In three cases it was reported that a relative of the paternal child killer was insane, disabled, had committed suicide or had spent time in a mental health care facility. In two cases these details were part of the paternal child killer's biography and were not dwelt upon. Henry Kidman had two relatives who committed suicide and Samuel Daw had a family member who had previously been insane.<sup>551</sup> In the case of George Penny, however, his family history painted a picture of inevitability that this crime had been committed. It was reported that his father and mother were second cousins, and his grandparents were first cousins. One of his paternal aunts died of brain disease and another,

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<sup>548</sup> 'Fowlhouse Murder', *Daily Mail* (4 January 1926), p. 7.

<sup>549</sup> 'Murder in a Dream State', *Daily Mail* (18 June 1929), p. 9.

<sup>550</sup> 'Four Children With Throats Cut', *The Time* (26 January 1929), p. 14.

<sup>551</sup> 'Dread of Tuberculosis', *Manchester Guardian* (16 April 1929), p. 8.

who was feeble minded, died in a nursing home for 'mental cases'. His father was peculiar at times, and his mother had shown mental instability over a long period.<sup>552</sup> Although the concept of degeneracy seems to have gone out of fashion as a cause of insanity, mental illness in the defendant's family was still a legitimate element when considering an individual's mental health and the committal of a supposedly insane act.

As with the first sub-sample delusions were reported in the newspaper coverage of a number of cases. Most of the delusions centred on the father believing he was being persecuted. Harry Troman had a 'constant dread that men, women, children, and motor-cars were after him', whilst Francis Burnside believed 'he could see somebody in the bedroom' and claimed there was a man that made him commit his crimes.<sup>553</sup> Other delusions centred on the fear of unemployment, yet again highlighting how central the role of provider was to a father's identity. Henry Sims had a delusion that 'someone was trying to get him out of his job', despite his employer stating 'there was no truth in the suggestion that any one...was trying to have him removed'.<sup>554</sup>

The credibility of delusions being an indication of insanity and, in some cases, the cause of fathers killing their children, was uncertain. At the trial of William Small it was proposed that he was under two delusions: one, that his son, for whom he reportedly had the greatest affection, was being badly treated by his housekeeper, and the other that his housekeeper had refused to marry him.<sup>555</sup> This line of defence did not convince the jury and he was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. Albert Banks, however, while serving with the army in India in 1913 had a delusion that 'two natives had murdered his wife and daughter' and he disappeared for two days hunting for the men he thought murdered his

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<sup>552</sup> 'Schoolmaster's Plea', *The Times* (7 June 1923), p. 16.

<sup>553</sup> 'Alleged Murder of Young Son', *Manchester Guardian* (10 August 1927), p. 6 and 'Father Charged With Murder', *Manchester Guardian* (3 August 1929), p. 13.

<sup>554</sup> 'Four Persons Shot Dead', *The Times* (22 April 1929), p. 11 and 'Delusion and a Triple Murder', *Daily Express* (22 April 1929), p. 7.

<sup>555</sup> 'Murdered His Son', *Daily Express* (27 July 1920), p. 6.

wife and daughter.<sup>556</sup> Banks did not murder his family until 1928 and it is interesting that his lawyer gave evidence about a delusion Banks had had fifteen years prior to the crime. His lawyer stated that Banks had ‘undoubtedly...acted under delusional insanity’ at the time he committed the crime.<sup>557</sup> Banks was found guilty of the murder of his wife and child, but insane. Because Banks’ delusions centred on the protection of his family rather than being wronged by them, as in Smalls’ case, they were more credible despite being over fifteen years old. The delusion also provided evidence of long-standing mental health problems.

The newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases revealed the extent to which suicide and attempted suicide were considered evidence of mental illness. In 23 cases (26 per cent) the father committed suicide after killing his child, or children, and a further nine men (10 per cent) attempted to take their own lives. As with the previous two sub-samples the number of men who either committed, or attempted to commit, suicide demonstrates that there was a link between paternal child killing and suicide. Ginger Frost also found in her study of domestic violence and cohabitation in the late nineteenth century that in cases in which the man killed his victim he was also likely to kill himself too.<sup>558</sup> There were only two verdicts of *felo-de-se* recorded in this sub-sample, demonstrating that this term was becoming old-fashioned and that suicide was more regularly seen as an insane act.<sup>559</sup> As can be seen in Table 3.27 none of the fathers who attempted to commit suicide after killing their children was punished for doing so, they were only punished for murdering their child. The table also highlights the link between a perpetrator’s mental health, his actions in killing his child and attempting to take his own life, and being found guilty but insane. Ian Miller contends that late-Victorian ideology encouraged explanations of suicide that emphasised it

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<sup>556</sup> ‘Minehead Murder Trial’, *The Times* (25 October 1928), p. 10.

<sup>557</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>558</sup> G. Frost, ‘“He Could Not Hold His Passions”: Domestic Violence and Cohabitation in England (1880-1905)’, *Crime, History, and Societies*, 12 (2008), p. 46.

<sup>559</sup> ‘*Felo-de-se*’ refers to an act of illegal suicide, i.e. one in which the perpetrator was deemed sane when he committed the act.

as a rational response to socio-economic circumstances.<sup>560</sup> This explanation is also prevalent in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample. It is evident from this sub-sample that socio-economic factors continued to be used into the early twentieth century to explain the behaviour of suicidal men and provide sympathy for their actions.

Verdict	Punishment	Number of Cases
Guilty of murder	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure be known	1
	Death	2
Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure be known	3
Total		6

Table 3.27: The verdicts and punishments of men who attempted suicide after killing their children, 1919-1929

Most of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers who committed suicide tended to be brief articles with little to no follow-up due to the nature of the case. Because there was no criminal trial there was little impetus to print more articles on the case. There were, however, two cases which bucked this more general trend. One such case was that of Roderick McKenzie, who shot his daughter and then himself. There were two aspects of this case which explain why it received more newspaper coverage. Firstly, McKenzie was a lieutenant and quartermaster and had served extensively in the army, and the murder weapon was his service revolver, which gave a sinister undertone to the crimes. Secondly, although he and his daughter reportedly lived 'on the happiest terms' McKenzie worried about his daughter's future because she was socialising with men and did not have the influence of her mother, who had died three years previously, to keep her in check.<sup>561</sup> His fear over his daughter's future was fixated on in the newspaper coverage, despite several accounts of his questionable mental state and him being found temporarily insane at the time he committed the crime. McKenzie's fears fitted with wider concerns about the alleged undermining of the nation's morals during war-time, anxieties which had been widely

<sup>560</sup> I. Miller, 'Representations of Suicide in Urban North-West England c.1870-1910: The Formative Role of Respectability, Class, Gender, and Morality', *Mortality*, 15 (2010), p. 192.

<sup>561</sup> 'Officer and Daughter Shot', *Manchester Guardian* (22 August 1921), p. 10.



articulated in the press. There were obviously several layers to understanding an instance of paternal child killing in which not just the perpetrator's mental state was investigated but other factors such as fear of dishonour, too.

### *Non-Physical Causes of Mental Illness*

Non-physical explanations were also put forward for breakdowns in mental health, and multiple causes were often proposed in the newspaper coverage. The main causes observed in this sub-sample centred on financial loss and unemployment, grief, and experiences in war. It is not surprising that uncertain financial circumstances and the effects of war featured so recurrently throughout the period 1919 to 1929 due to the post-war recession and the fact that many ex-soldiers were still recovering from the effects of their war service. The most frequently discussed, non-physical cause of mental illness was the impact of business failure and unemployment on the mental health of paternal child killers. Male unemployment had long been linked to increases in domestic violence, shame, and family breakdown.<sup>562</sup> In the 1920s many fathers could not provide for their families due to high levels of unemployment caused by economic depression.<sup>563</sup> For men with children, unemployment or under-employment was seen as a failure in fathering and this was not a problem exclusive to working class men.<sup>564</sup> Despite rising levels of women's employment and the state's increasing economic provision for families, breadwinning remained at the core of fatherhood and was conceived as the father's responsibility.<sup>565</sup> Although unemployment benefit during the 1920s represented a significant improvement on welfare provision before 1914, it was still meagre and undermined men's ability to provide as well as they would like. The shame resulting from being unable to provide for a family and the

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<sup>562</sup> J. Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class, 1865-1914* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2015), p. 51.

<sup>563</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 25.

<sup>564</sup> Strange, *Fatherhood and the British Working Class*, p. 51.

<sup>565</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

relentless, and often fruitless, search for employment demoralised fathers, as shown by many of the cases in this sub-sample.

The damaging effects of the post-war recession can be seen quite clearly in this sub-sample and in three cases it was explicitly stated that these men had killed their children due to financial losses. Both Ernest Coates and Harry Kaye murdered their families, including their wives, and then committed suicide. They were said to live in 'superior' housing, and were reported to be very wealthy. Ernest Coates had been reduced to a 'state of absolute depression' after being 'hit by every one of the post-war troubles'.<sup>566</sup> The newspaper coverage revealed that whilst the Coates family gave the appearance of being very wealthy and living in luxury they had lost nearly all of their money. Harry Kaye meanwhile had suffered considerable losses in connection to his business and consequently had been 'worried and depressed'.<sup>567</sup> The journalists' explanation of these crimes focused exclusively on the fact that the perpetrators were affected by their financial losses rather than on why they chose to react in such an extreme way.

Colonel Wray murdered his entire family and then committed suicide five years after the 1921 to 1922 economic depression. Wray's surviving son claimed that his father had been 'depressed owing to industrial trouble and the fact that an investment had not turned out so successfully as he anticipated'.<sup>568</sup> Yet, his son also stated that he believed his father had had 'no financial difficulties'.<sup>569</sup> Outwardly Wray portrayed himself as a successful businessman who had weathered the storm of financial difficulties. Privately, however, he had suffered economic losses. Perhaps, in an attempt to preserve his pride Wray did not speak to anyone about his financial difficulties. All three of these cases demonstrate that it was not just the idea of living in poverty that caused these men anxiety but loss of status and the blow to their self-esteem that a change in financial circumstances caused. Pride as

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<sup>566</sup> 'Dead Family's Strange History', *Manchester Guardian* (2 November 1921), p. 11.

<sup>567</sup> 'Saw Wealth Slipping Away', *Manchester Guardian* (14 September 1922), p. 8.

<sup>568</sup> 'Wensleydale Murders and Suicide', *Manchester Guardian* (22 October 1926), p. 6.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*

well as provision for their families was at stake, highlighting how central the issue of economic provision was for fathers in the early twentieth century.

Unemployment demoralised the individual and undermined their capacity or desire to seek work.<sup>570</sup> The 'dread of unemployment' was said to have 'preyed on [Looijen's] mind' and he particularly disliked the idea of going on the dole.<sup>571</sup> The pressure he felt over his inability to secure sufficient work in order to provide for himself and his family forced him to act contrary to the way a father was supposed to behave. The fear of unemployment and loss of wages can also be seen in the case of Frederick Turner who murdered his two sons before committing suicide. He had been ill for three months and dreaded seeing the Board of Health in case his illness caused his transfer to a less skilled job, which meant a reduction in his salary.<sup>572</sup> The jury found that he murdered his sons and committed suicide whilst of unsound mind. Although it was not stated whether Turner was in receipt of any sickness benefit or whether he was able to do work during his illness, it is evident that his experience made him fearful of what life would be like on a lower income as a widower with four children to look after.

Typically, men who murdered their children because of their straitened economic circumstances did so because they believed their children would be 'better off' dead than living alive in poverty. Captain John Pirie was stated to be 'despondent on account of his inability to provide for his family owing to unemployment'.<sup>573</sup> Pirie stated in a letter that was found at his home that he preferred to kill his family rather than himself as this would have left them unprotected to face the world. This resolution to the economic difficulties he and his family faced demonstrates the extent to which Pirie had internalised the role of provider and protector. Although he was demobilised from the army with a 70 per cent disability

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<sup>570</sup> R. McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class: Social Relations in Britain 1880-1950* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1994), p. 231.

<sup>571</sup> 'Father's Frenzy', *Daily Mirror* (13 April 1925), p. 10.

<sup>572</sup> 'Triple Tragedy in London Flat', *Daily Mirror* (1 February 1923), p. 15.

<sup>573</sup> 'Airman and His Family', *Daily Mail* (2 October 1924), p. 7.

pension evidently this was not enough for him to sustain his family and perhaps his disability prevented him from gaining sufficient employment.<sup>574</sup>

As would be expected in the post-First World War period, men's war-time experiences were discussed alongside other factors that may have led to a breakdown in their mental health and to them killing their child. That is not to say that all paternal child killers who were ex-soldiers were psychologically affected by their experiences in war but that their experiences were invoked in the newspaper coverage to provoke sympathy and understanding. As Fiona Reid, Joanna Bourke and John Horne point out most men did not become psychological casualties during the First World War, and most men dealt reasonably well with the stresses and strains of intense warfare.<sup>575</sup> However, the war service of ex-soldiers was reported in the newspaper coverage and their war-time experiences were frequently suggested as potential reasons for their breakdown in mental health.

The cases examined in this section contradict Ginger Frost's contention that as the war fell further into the past the influence of war trauma counted far less in the eyes of judges, juries, the Home Office, and the press.<sup>576</sup> In this sub-sample, 30 per cent of men were reported to have served in the First World War. Of these men, 25 per cent were found guilty but insane and 15 per cent were found to have been temporarily insane or of unsound mind at the coroner's inquest. Although the sub-sample used for this chapter is small, these findings are significant as they indicate that army service was relevant to a paternal child killer's biography despite the war moving further into the past. Daniel Grey has also

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<sup>574</sup> According to Michael Robinson's estimates Pirie would have received between 13s 9d a week (50 per cent disability) and 22s a week (80 per cent disability). The same disability pay scale was used in both the United Kingdom and Ireland. See M. Robinson, ' "Nobody's Children?": The Ministry of Pensions and the Treatment of Disabled Great War Veterans in the Irish Free State, 1921-1939', *Irish Studies Review*, 25 (2017), p. 317.

<sup>575</sup> Reid, *Broken Men*, p. 43, J. Bourke, 'Effeminacy, Ethnicity and the End of Trauma: The Suffering of 'Shell-Shocked' Men in Great Britain and Ireland, 1914-1939', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35 (2000), p. 57, and J. Horne, 'Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation', in S. Dudink, K. Hagemann, and J. Tosh (eds.), *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2004), p. 32.

<sup>576</sup> Frost, 'Such a Poor Finish', p. 108.

examined how the press interpreted paternal child killing committed by ex-soldiers in his thesis.<sup>577</sup> He discusses the case of George Lucas (also present in this sub-sample) who was convicted in January 1920 for the murder of his infant daughter. Grey finds that Lucas's physical condition was focussed on, and suggests that journalists were reluctant to stigmatise a veteran, thus, avoiding the implication that the brutalising effects of war had left British servicemen mentally scarred and prone to crime.<sup>578</sup> Similarly, the newspaper coverage of cases in the sub-sample used for this chapter did not appear to stigmatise ex-soldiers. It is clear that newspapers did not shy away from discussing the mental health of ex-soldiers. Army service and the resulting effects of ex-soldiers experiences were mentioned in the newspaper coverage to provide understanding and sympathy for the paternal child killer in question. There was no suggestion that they had been brutalised by their experiences but that their mental wellbeing had been affected.

In the sub-sample of cases used for this chapter precise definitions and more general terms were used to discuss the mental health of those affected by their war experiences; men were clearly labelled as 'shell shocked' or suffering from vague 'nervous trouble'.<sup>579</sup> The available information provided on the occupation and social class of these fathers, and the use of different terms for war-induced mental illness supports, to an extent, arguments put forward by Suzie Grogan and Fiona Reid, among others, that classifications were based on social class.<sup>580</sup> It has been argued that the term 'shell shock' was reserved for working class men, who were usually in the lower ranks of the army, whereas vaguer phrases, such as 'serious mental trouble', were used for men of a higher social class, such as

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<sup>577</sup> D. Grey, 'Discourses of Infanticide in England, 1880-1922' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Roehampton University, 2008), p. 56.

<sup>578</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>579</sup> During the First World War shell shock was a name given to a series of complex medical conditions that afflicted servicemen during and after the war; some men had short episodes of mental breakdown while others remained mentally damaged for life.

<sup>580</sup> See S. Grogan, *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War's Legacy for Britain's Mental Health* (Pen and Sword: Barnsley, 2014), Reid, *Broken Men*, I. Whitehead, *Doctors in the Great War* (Pen and Sword Military: Barnsley, 1999), and Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*.

officers and captains. However, of the four men who were said to have suffered from indistinct nervous troubles only two can be identified as being of a higher social class based on their army rank alone. For the other two men no information was provided in the newspaper coverage about their occupation, social class, and army rank making it more difficult to determine the extent to which vague terms were restricted to men of a higher social class. Similarly of the three men who were said to be suffering from shell shock two were employed as miners, which supports the social class theory of categorization, but for the other father no information was given on his occupation.

The long-lasting effects of the First World War can be seen in several cases in this sub-sample. John Breeze, who murdered his three children in 1926, had fought in France from 1914 until the end of the war. During his service he had been very depressed and he was hospitalised for six months due to shell shock.<sup>581</sup> Breeze's experience of shell shock and unemployment as an ex-soldier in the post-war period may have struck a chord with the public. Despite the fact he had been hospitalised eight years prior to the crimes, the murder of his family was portrayed as a tragic culmination of his wartime experiences. The pervasive effects of the First World War on mental health can also be seen in the case of John Jones who murdered his daughter and attempted to murder his wife in 1929. Although the newspaper coverage of the case did not provide much detail on Jones's military experience, it can be assumed he saw active service during the First World War as in his dreams he fought 'his battles with the Germans over again'.<sup>582</sup> Jones murdered his family over a decade after the First World War ended showing its lasting relevance as both a cause of mental illness and as a factor in someone's criminal culpability.

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<sup>581</sup> 'Three Children Shot', *Manchester Guardian* (6 January 1926), p. 10.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*

## **Conclusions to Chapter Five**

This chapter has demonstrated that economic factors, such as unemployment, under-employment, and fears of poverty, remained important in the explanation of why fathers killed their children. This was also evident in the previous two sub-samples covering the period 1900 to 1918. However, in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample unemployment and financial worries acted as a shorthand for being deserving of sympathy and provided a way to understand why a man would kill his child. The frustration at being unable to secure steady employment as well as the relentless struggle against straitened economic circumstances had an effect on the mental health of some fathers. Paternal child murder was often seen as the only option left open and a more merciful, less shameful way of ensuring that their children would not suffer. This was evident in the first sub-sample too and was not specific to the effects of the post-war recession but reflective of the dangerous consequences of unemployment and a lack of adequate welfare provision on mental health.

It has been argued in this chapter that paternal child killers, particularly those convicted of murder, were treated more leniently in the period 1919 to 1929 in comparison with cases in the previous two sub-samples. This was due to changing opinions about how such crimes, especially those in which the sanity of the accused was questioned, should be punished. There was less reassurance that the death sentence dissuaded people from committing violent crimes. Additionally, society was becoming less violent, and had been since the end of the nineteenth century, so violent forms of punishment seemed at odds with a society which saw itself as civilised. For men charged with the murder of their children this meant that there were increased findings of guilty but insane and the commutation of many death sentences to penal servitude for life.

This chapter has analysed how newspapers reported on the mental health of men accused of killing their children. Journalists selected evidence relating to mental illness and criminal culpability and decided how this was to be presented for readers to understand. In

the post-First World War period journalists were more willing to include medical testimony that used medical phraseology rather than evidence which closer resembled that of a lay witness. Additionally, in the newspaper articles on cases of paternal child killing which invoked the insanity plea, more space was given to the testimony of medical experts than lay witnesses. This suggests that readers of these papers had an appetite for more nuanced discussions of crime and criminal culpability, not just the bare essentials of whether a defendant was guilty at the time they committed the crime. This chapter indicates that there was a shift in how the public reacted to the testimony of medical experts in criminal trials and that there was a desire for more knowledge relating to the mental health of a defendant at the time of the crime.

This chapter has also challenged Ginger Frost's contention that as the First World War fell further into the past the army service of ex-soldiers counted less in the eyes of judges and the national press. There was also concern that men returned from the First World War brutalised by their experiences. While the evidence in this chapter does not support this, it is clear that some men did return changed by their experiences and that the general public were willing to extend understanding to such men. Evidence from cases analysed in this chapter has indicated that wartime experiences of ex-soldiers who killed their children were used in the newspaper coverage to explain their actions and provoke sympathy in readers. Contrary to Frost's findings, the army service of ex-soldiers was used in the newspaper coverage and in the courts to explain cases of paternal child killing until the end of the 1920s. Frost's sample was too small to sustain her argument and by using a larger sample it can be seen that sympathy and understanding was given to ex-soldiers who committed paternal child murder. Lenient punishments, findings of insanity and favourable representations in the press all demonstrate that some attempt was made at understanding the impact of the psychological and physical strain of soldiers' experiences.



It is also evident from cases analysed in both the previous chapter and this chapter that the nature of press reporting on violent crimes, such as paternal child killing, underwent a change during the First World War and that this change continued until the end of the 1920s. Less graphic descriptions of how the child victims were killed and less in-depth coverage of cases were key features in how reporting changed. Readers' sensibilities remained affected by the brutality and loss incurred by the First World War. Gory aspects of case, especially the way in which child victims died, were not thought to be suitable for an audience still in recovery from the First World War. Although violent crime remained of interest to newspaper readers, other forms of crimes news also vied for their attention. Evidently, there were trends in which forms of offending piqued the curiosity and concern of the general public.

## **Chapter Six: “Father and Child Tragedy”: Paternal Child Killing, 1930 to**

### **1939**

The period 1930 to 1939 is under-researched in the history of paternal child killing, as well as infanticide and child murder by mothers more generally, so this chapter is a foray into unknown territory.<sup>583</sup> Additionally the historiography of crime in the 1930s is less developed than that which examines earlier decades of the twentieth century, meaning that this chapter adds new knowledge to the history of violent crime in the 1930s.<sup>584</sup> Since court records are unavailable for the 1930s due to the 100-year rule which prohibits access to material of a sensitive or personal nature, newspapers are a great source for exploring representations of crime in the 1930s.<sup>585</sup> There is also little written about the newspaper coverage of crime in the 1930s. Ashley Borrett finds in his study of local newspaper accounts of crime in interwar Hull that attitudes towards the punishment of crime seesawed between a desire for harsh punishment and rehabilitation.<sup>586</sup> This lack of coherency makes it difficult to posit generalisations about attitudes to crime in the interwar period. Murder was not a

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<sup>583</sup> See D. Grey, ‘Parenting, Infanticide, and the State in England and Wales, 1870-1950’, in H. Barron and C. Siebrecht (eds.), *Parenting and the State in Britain and Europe, c. 1870-1950* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2017), pp. 73-92, D. Grey, ‘“The Agony of Despair”: Pain and the Cultural Script of Infanticide in England and Wales, 1860-1960’, in R. Boddice (ed.), *Pain and Emotion in Modern History* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2014), C. Rattigan, *“What Else Could I Do?”: Single Mothers and Infanticide, Ireland 1900-1950*, (Irish Academic Press: Dublin, 2012), M. Jackson, *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002), T. Ward, ‘The Sad Subject of Infanticide: Law, Medicine and Child Murder, 1860-1938’, *Social and Legal Studies*, 8 (1999), pp. 163-180, L. Danson and K. Soothill, ‘Child Murder and the Media: A Study of the Reporting of Child Murder in *The Times* 1887-1990’, *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry*, 7 (1996), pp. 495-503, and L. Rose, *Massacre of the Innocents: Infanticide in Great Britain 1800-1939* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1986).

<sup>584</sup> See A. Brown, *Inter-war Penal Policy and Crime in England: The Dartmoor Convict Prison Riot, 1932* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), C. Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England* (Pearson Education Limited: Harlow, 2011), S. D’Cruze, ‘Intimacy, Professionalism and Domestic Homicide in Interwar Britain: The Case of Buck Ruxton’, *Women’s History Review*, 16 (2007), pp. 701-722, A. Davies, ‘Street Gangs, Crime and Policing in Glasgow During the 1930s: The Case of the Beehive Boys’, *Social History*, 23 (1998), pp. 251-267, and H. Taylor, ‘The Politics of the Rising Crime Statistics of England and Wales, 1914-1960’, *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés*, 2 (1998), pp. 5-28.

<sup>585</sup> See ‘Introduction’ Footnote 3 for a full discussion of the 100-year rule.

<sup>586</sup> A. Borrett, ‘Crime and Criminality during the Inter-war Period: A Local Perspective’ (Unpublished paper presented at The British Crime Historians Symposium, Edge Hill University, 31 August 2018). Borrett is currently studying reactions to crime, criminality and class in Hull and East Yorkshire during the inter-war period for his PhD at the University of Hull.

common crime in Hull and the death sentence was rarely imposed. Borrett's analysis, therefore, only focuses on petty and non-serious crimes. National newspaper coverage of paternal child killing in the 1930s reveals that there was a desire to see justice done but also a greater willingness to ascribe offending to personal, social and economic factors as well as breakdowns in mental health.

The history of mental illness and mental health care in the 1930s is also under-explored.<sup>587</sup> This is also due to the type of sources typically used to explore this subject. Patient case notes are difficult to access due to confidentiality rules, although many records can be used if it can be proved that the patient in question is deceased (see 'Introduction', footnote 3). Again, this is where newspapers are a useful source, particularly when considering public understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. In the 1930s it might be expected that the latest medical theories of mental illness were evident in the newspaper coverage, especially in reported medical testimony. Freudian and Jungian theories of the unconscious and the language of psychoanalysis, for example, became increasingly fashionable after the First World War. However, these theories did not impact the way in which the mental health of paternal child killers was discussed in the newspaper coverage. Understandings of mental illness used in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample were still being used to explain breakdowns in mental health in the period 1930 to 1939.

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<sup>587</sup> See A. Brumby, 'From 'Pauper Lunatics' to 'Rate-Aided Patients': Removing the Stigma of Mental Health Care? 1888-1938' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Huddersfield, 2015), J. Walke, 'Repute and Remedy: Psychiatric Patients and Their Treatment at Bethlem Royal Hospital, 1930-1983' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, 2015), E. Jones, S. Rahman, and B. Everitt, 'Psychiatric Case Notes: Symptoms of Mental Illness and Their Attribution at the Maudsley Hospital, 1924-35', *History of Psychiatry*, 23 (2012), pp. 156-168, N. Baur, 'Family Influence and Psychiatric Care: Physical Treatments in Devon Mental Hospitals, c.1920 to the 1970s', *Endeavour*, 73 (2012), pp. 172-183, E. Jones and S. Rahman, 'Framing Mental Illness, 1923-1939: The Maudsley Hospital and Its Patients', *Social History of Medicine*, 21 (2008), pp. 107-125, and L. Westwood, 'A Quiet Revolution in Brighton: Dr Helen Boyle's Pioneering Approach to Mental Health Care, 1899-1939', *The Society for the Social History of Medicine*, 14 (2001), pp. 439-457.

There was, however, a wider range of medical terminology used in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers whose mental health was in question, reflecting reader interest in this topic. The uncertainty surrounding the boundaries of mental illness and how to understand behaviour that seemed out of the ordinary was prominent in the newspaper coverage of cases examined in this chapter. The field of mental health care was becoming an integral part of medicine in the twentieth century. Disputes over alleged causes of mental breakdowns and terminology used to discuss mental health in cases in which the paternal child killer's sanity was in question were picked up on in the press. Interest in these discrepancies was due to the public's increased awareness of and desire for knowledge about mental illness as well as shrewd journalists who sensed that these kinds of disagreements might attract readers.

As with the previous chapter the way in which socio-economic factors, such as unemployment and army service, were reported on in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers are considered in this chapter. The 1929 to 1932 economic Depression was thought to have increased the occurrence of crime, but demonstrating clear links between unemployment and offending is difficult.<sup>588</sup> Indeed, historians have questioned the extent to which the economic downturn led to an increase of reported incidences of crime.<sup>589</sup> However, unemployment needs to be considered when examining cases of paternal child killing as the economic difficulties of a number of fathers were discussed in the newspaper coverage and used by journalists to explain their actions. It has been established in the previous three chapters, and by Jade Shepherd and Cathryn Wilson, that financial instability

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<sup>588</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England*, p. 25.

<sup>589</sup> This has been explored by Andrew Davies in his study of gang crime in Glasgow in the 1930s in which he suggests that it is too crude to depict unemployment as the cause of gang conflicts and gang crime. However, unemployment undermined traditional work-based masculinities and gangs allowed members to project a tough version of masculinity. Although gang crime and paternal child killing are very different crimes Davies's findings regarding the demonstration of masculinity is applicable to unemployed fathers who killed their children since this was an area of their lives they could control. It was also a way in which fathers could display their masculinity and power over their children in the most definitive way. See Davies, 'Street Gangs, Crime and Policing in Glasgow During the 1930s', pp. 251-267.

was an acknowledged factor in the commission of paternal child killing. This chapter demonstrates that it was not just long-term unemployment that affected men's mental wellbeing but shorter periods of job loss, job insecurity, and potential financial difficulties or financial ruin. All of these factors struck at the core responsibility of fatherhood and masculinity, provision. There is evidence in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample that other qualities were desired in fathers, such as affection and protection, but it was economic provision that was most important and, consequently, most damaging.

This chapter analyses the findings of a sub-sample of 75 cases of paternal child killing as reported in a selection of English national newspapers from the period 1930 to the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939. The analysis is split into five sections which focus on different aspects of the material found in newspaper articles and questions what these details reveal about the way in which paternal child killers were conceptualised. The first section examines the biographical details of the paternal child killers and their victims. This is followed by an exploration of the charges, convictions and punishments of paternal child killers. Section three explores the extent of newspaper reporting on individual cases. In section four the editorial devices employed by newspapers are examined. Finally, the way in which understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability were portrayed in the newspaper coverage is considered.

## **1. Overview of the Sub-sample**

In this section the biographical details of paternal child killers and their victims are analysed to demonstrate the range of individual characteristics of the alleged perpetrators in the sub-sample. As argued in chapter three, paternal child killers came from a range of backgrounds and circumstances. The geographic spread and nationality of men in the sub-sample is examined, as well as marital status, occupation, and type of housing in which the accused paternal child killer lived. The relationship the paternal child killer had with his wife or

partner, and his behaviour after killing the child and in court is also considered. The number, age, and gender of the child victims, in addition to their legitimacy, is examined, and whether there were any other victims in the case.

#### *Geographical Spread of Cases and Nationality of Paternal Child Killers*

The majority (93 per cent) of cases in this sub-sample occurred in England and Wales, as can be seen in Table 4.1. The number of cases across all four sub-samples (1900 to 1939) reported to have occurred in countries outside of England and Wales decreased significantly. This was also mirrored in the nationalities of paternal child killers in this period. In only one case was the nationality of the paternal child killer reported to be different to that of the country in which the crime was committed, as can be seen in Table 4.2. No attempt was made to position paternal child killing as a crime committed by foreigners and this was consistent throughout the entire sample. It is also evident in this sub-sample that cases of paternal child killing were not limited to urban conurbations, traditional hotbeds of crime, but were carried out in a range of cities and towns of varying sizes as well as villages and hamlets. Only 10 per cent of cases were committed in London.

Country	Number of Cases
England	69
Wales	1
Scotland	1
France	1
America	1
Jersey	1
Guernsey	1
Total	75

*Table 4.1: The location of cases of paternal child killing, 1930-1939*

Nationality	Number of Cases
English	71
Welsh	1
Scottish	1
American	1
French	1
Total	75

Table 4.2: Cases in which the individual's nationality was stated, 1930-1939

#### *Marital Status of Paternal Child Killers*

As can be seen in Table 4.3, 59 per cent of paternal child killers were reported to be married at the time the child was killed but there were also a number of cases in which less traditional relationships were reported. This finding is consistent with the previous sub-samples as well as with Jonathan Andrews's contention that paternal child killing was the act of a married man in the period 1860 to 1920.<sup>590</sup> However, the existence of other relationship statuses in this sub-sample, especially when viewed alongside the reported explanation, indicates that these less traditional relationships played a role in some cases of paternal child killing. For example, for one widowed father, who was also unemployed, the pressure to provide economically and look after his children proved too much. Two of the four men who were reportedly separated from their wives allegedly killed their children out of revenge, directly linking the breakdown of their relationship to the explanation of the crime.

Marital Status	Number of Cases
Married	46
Widowed	3
Separated	4
Lived with a woman	1
Engaged to mother of child	1
Unidentified	20
Total	75

Table 4.3: The marital status of men in the sub-sample, 1930-1939

<sup>590</sup> J. Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure: Discharging Child-Murderers from Broadmoor and Perth Criminal Lunatic Department, c. 1860-1920', in M. Jackson (ed.), *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000* (Ashgate Publishing Limited: Surrey, 2002), p. 223.

### *Employment Status and Occupation of Paternal Child Killers*

In 28 per cent of cases the paternal child killer was reportedly unemployed at the time he killed his child, in 55 per cent of cases the father was employed, and in the remaining 17 per cent of cases his employment status was not recorded in the newspaper coverage. The high percentage of unemployed men is expected given that the 1930s saw soaring levels of unemployment that threw between 18 and 30 per cent of the population below the poverty line at any one time.<sup>591</sup> According to official figures, in 1931 23 per cent of adult male workers were recorded as being out of work, not including thousands of uninsured workers who also experienced unemployment.<sup>592</sup> Consequently, unemployment had crucial consequences for fatherhood and masculinity as many fathers could not provide for their families and this was difficult for men who took their role as provider seriously.<sup>593</sup>

In the sub-sample half of those men reported to be unemployed lived in industrial northern towns and cities that had experienced a decline in their main trade, such as Ashington, Barnsley, and Wakefield. Jon Lawrence points out that not all working class men were affected by the economic Depression for a prolonged period of time and that the 'affluent' members of the working class were overshadowed by attention paid to the plight of millions of working people affected by unemployment and poverty.<sup>594</sup> However, there were a high percentage of cases in this sub-sample in which unemployment assumed a role in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing but this was by no means the only explanation. Perhaps in an attempt to highlight the negative impact of the economic Depression for great swathes of the British working class, newspaper journalists and editors paid more attention to case of paternal child killing in which the explanation was connected

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<sup>591</sup> J. Bourke, *Working-Class Cultures in Britain 1890-1960: Gender, Class and Ethnicity* (Routledge: London, 1994), p. 13.

<sup>592</sup> S. Todd, *The People: The Rise and Fall of the Working Class* (John Murray: London, 2015), p. 62.

<sup>593</sup> L. King, *Family Men: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Britain, 1914-1960* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015), p. 25.

<sup>594</sup> J. Lawrence, 'Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life in Britain, c.1930-1964', *Cultural and Social History*, 10 (2013), p. 276.



to unemployment. In continuity with the previous sub-samples there were a range of occupations reported varying from working class jobs, such as a labourer, a miner, a builder, a boot repairer, a hotel porter, and a valet to more lower middle class jobs including a grocer and a butcher, and upper middle class occupations such as a merchant and an accountant.

#### *Type of Housing Paternal Child Killer Lived in*

The type of housing a paternal child killer resided in was not recorded in the newspaper coverage of every case. Of the cases in which information was provided about accommodation the type of housing ranged from independent dwellings, such as a cottage, bungalow, or house, to shared accommodation, and temporary lodgings (as can be seen in Table 4.4). There were also two fathers who were reported to live in some form of social housing; Samuel Dimdore lived at Spencer House of Larkhall Estate in London whilst Charles Whiting lived in a council house in Hemel Hempstead, the family were also noted to be ‘respectable people’.<sup>595</sup> In many towns and cities council housing was aimed at lower middle class and respectable working class families.

Type of Lodging	Number of Cases
Lodging house	1
Cottage	3
Farm	3
Bungalow	1
Rooms over a shop	1
Lodge in the grounds of a house	1
Hut	1
Caravan	1
Four-room house	1
No home	2
Unidentified	60
Total	75

*Table 4.4: The different types of lodging of paternal child killers, 1930-1939*

<sup>595</sup> Building of the Larkhall Estate started in 1926 and was completed in 1929. The estate was part of an ambitious but never completed interwar housing project which aimed to provide working-class housing for 4500 people. ‘4 of Family Found Dead’, *Daily Mirror* (3 March 1936), p. 8.

### *Relationship of Paternal Child Killer with Partner and Children*

In nineteen cases (24 per cent) it was reported in the newspaper coverage that prior to killing their children fathers had been affectionate. The newspaper coverage of this sub-sample included evidence of paternal child killers playing with their children, being 'very fond' of them, and treating their children with the 'utmost kindness and care'.<sup>596</sup> The bar for 'good' fatherhood was raised by the end of the interwar period and provision of essentials, such as food, clothing, and accommodation, was no longer good enough.<sup>597</sup> Daniel Grey argues that evidence of previous 'good fatherhood' was central to a sympathetic view being taken of the case.<sup>598</sup> This helps to explain why these descriptions were included in the newspaper coverage as they serve to underline how uncharacteristic it was for these fathers to behave in this way.

In ten cases (13 per cent) it was reported that fathers had demonstrated unaffectionate behaviour to their children. William Hudson, for example, was charged with the murder of his son to whom he took 'an intense dislike' and 'took almost every opportunity of inflicting punishment' on.<sup>599</sup> He blew cigarette smoke in his face 'to make him tough' and his wife claimed that he had 'hated the baby since it was born'.<sup>600</sup> Much like the descriptions of affectionate behaviour the evidence of fathers treating their children badly strengthened the negative portrayal of these particular fathers as well as providing an explanation for their actions.

In seven cases (9 per cent) it was reported that the paternal child killer had a good relationship with his wife or partner. These positive descriptions, such as living happily together and being 'sweethearts', encouraged the newspaper reader to reflect

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<sup>596</sup> 'Family Terribly Injured', *Manchester Guardian* (27 May 1930), p. 22, 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1934), p. 15, 'Father Charged With Causing Son's Death', *The Times* (9 October 1934), p. 5, and ' "Mercy Murder" ', *Daily Mail* (14 July 1930), p. 12.

<sup>597</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 52.

<sup>598</sup> Grey, 'Parenting, Infanticide, and the State in England and Wales', p. 84.

<sup>599</sup> 'Father Accused of Baby Murder', *Daily Mirror* (10 March 1936), p. 5.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5 and 'Baby's Death', *Manchester Guardian* (11 February 1936), p. 4.

sympathetically on the case by associating the father with positive depictions of his behaviour.<sup>601</sup> Additionally, it provided evidence of previously loving family behaviour and encouraged the reader to view this father as a family man rather than an inherently violent individual. Comparatively, descriptions of bad relationships with wives or partners, included in the newspaper coverage of seven cases in this sub-sample (9 per cent), served to emphasise the bad character of the paternal child killer. It also provided an explanation as to why the father in question was capable of committing such an act. For example, the marriage between Charles Ivermee, who murdered one of his children and his wife before committing suicide, and his wife 'had not been a happy one'.<sup>602</sup> His wife had complained many times about the cruelty of her husband as he had threatened to murder her on several occasions.<sup>603</sup> Evidence of ongoing domestic abuse at first cast Ivermee in a negative light in the press. However, it was later revealed that Ivermee's wife had been having an affair prior to the crimes. After this revelation Ivermee became a figure of pity and it was his wife's lover who was then castigated in the press. Because Ivermee committed suicide it lay with the coroner to determine whether he was sane at the time of the crimes, and therefore, guilty. Clearly, Ivermee's cruel behaviour towards his wife did not influence the outcome of the coroner's inquest as the coroner believed he was insane at the time of the crimes. There were many different factors which could influence how a paternal child killer was presented in the national newspapers depending on which social norms had been contravened.

### *Displays of Emotion*

In ten cases (13 per cent) it was reported that the paternal child killer showed emotion either on arrest or during his trial. In five cases (6.5 per cent) it was reported that the paternal child killer did not show any emotion after killing his child. As with the inclusion of

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<sup>601</sup> 'Family of 3 Found Dead', *Daily Express* (5 September 1933), p. 13.

<sup>602</sup> 'Triple Tragedy', *The Sunday Times* (19 March 1933), p. 2.

<sup>603</sup> 'Bungalow Crime in Bucks', *The Times* (5 April 1933), p. 9.

whether or not the father was affectionate to his family, the choice to report on whether or not a paternal child killer demonstrated emotion alters how the article was read and how the paternal child killer was viewed. By demonstrating emotion it was implied that the paternal child killer was remorseful for what he did which in turn encouraged sympathy from the readers. In several of the cases it was reported that the father broke down after being sentenced suggesting that it was fear of punishment and the emotional toil of the trial rather than remorse that caused his emotional display. It is significant that the emotional behaviour of the alleged perpetrator was only acknowledged in the newspaper coverage of 20 per cent of cases. The emotion highlighted in the newspaper coverage were examples of male behaviour which noticeably deviated from the norm. Those who showed no emotion were abnormally unemotional and those who demonstrated heightened emotion were acting contrary to masculine expectations.

#### *Number, Gender and Age of Child Victims*

In this sub-sample there were 107 child victims. In 74 per cent of cases in this sub-sample it was reported that one child was killed. An individual child was more likely to be killed than all of the children in the family (see Tables 4.5 and 4.6), as has been the case throughout the entire sample. This suggests that paternal child killing was, in many cases, spontaneous. There were those cases in which a father chose to kill a specific child, usually in cases in which the child was sick or, less altruistically, unwanted, but these were in the minority. In some cases the act of killing a child was premeditated but for others the child seemed to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Number of Child Victims	Number of Cases
1	56
2	13
3	4
4	1
5	1
Total	75

*Table 4.5: The number of child victims per case, 1930-1939*

	Number of Child Victims Referred to in Newspaper Reports				
Number of Children in Family	1	2	3	4	5
1	9	0	0	0	0
2	3	7	0	0	0
3	1	3	3	0	0
4	3	0	0	1	0
5	0	0	0	0	0
6	0	0	0	0	1
7	1	0	0	0	0
8	0	1	0	0	0

*Table 4.6: The number of children in the family (including legitimate, illegitimate, and stepchildren) in comparison to the number of victims, 1930-1939*

In 41 per cent of cases the child victim was male, in 37 per cent of cases the child victim was female, in 15 per cent children of both genders were killed, and in the remaining 7 per cent of cases the gender of the child was not recorded in the newspaper coverage. The percentage of male child victims was slightly higher than in the previous sub-samples, reversing the general trend in the previous three sub-samples (covering the period 1900 to 1929) of more female child victims than male. As with cases in the previous sub-samples the age at which children were most likely to be killed was between one and ten years old (see Table 4.7). This echoes Andrews's findings for the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries which demonstrated that children between the age of two and fifteen years were the most likely to be killed by their fathers.<sup>604</sup> In twelve cases (15 per cent) the paternal child killer also killed his wife or partner and in another four cases (5 per cent) an attempt was made on her life. There were also five cases (6.5 per cent) in which the father attempted to kill another of his children but did not succeed. Unlike the previous sub-samples it was not reported that there were any other victims, such as a neighbour or another family member.

<sup>604</sup> Andrews, 'The Boundaries of Her Majesty's Pleasure', p. 220.

Age of Victim(s)	Number of Victim(s)
Under 1 year old	19
1 to 10 years old	61
11 to 18 years old	12
Over 18 years	5
Description	5

Table 4.7: Table showing the age of child victims, 1930-1939

### *Legitimacy of the Child Victim(s)*

The most common relationship between a paternal child killer and a child victim was a legitimate child (84 per cent of cases). As can be seen in Table 4.8 there were a range of other relationships reported in the newspaper coverage, such as an illegitimate child, a stepchild, or the father denying that the child was his. The paternity of child victims was an issue of contention for some paternal child killers and in some cases the child's legitimacy was used to explain why the child was killed. In the case of Roy Gregory, who was charged with the murder of his wife's illegitimate child, it was reported in *The Times* that 'it was not wanted by the prisoner'.<sup>605</sup> Similarly, Frederick Rushworth did not want his illegitimate child and persuaded the child's mother, Lydia Binks, a married woman living apart from her husband, to put the child 'quietly out of the way'.<sup>606</sup> Because the couple were engaged in an extra-marital affair, they did not want to keep the child.

Relationship to Offender	Number of Cases
Legitimate child	66
Illegitimate child	3
Stepchild	4
Father denied paternity	1
Adopted child	1
Total	75

Table 4.8: The relationship between victims and offenders, 1930-1939

## **2. Legal Process**

This section only considers the 70 cases from England and Wales since they shared the same legal system and it would be too complicated to examine the legal system of each country in

<sup>605</sup> 'Baby's Body Buried in Cellar', *The Times* (24 November 1933), p. 4.

<sup>606</sup> 'Child Murder Charge', *The Times* (21 November 1934), p. 4.

which cases of paternal child killing occurred. Newspapers are not the perfect source to use to determine how many men were charged for the murder or manslaughter of their child since it is not certain that all cases brought before the courts were reported on by one or more of the newspapers used to construct the sample. However, the data discussed in this part of the chapter, when viewed in conjunction with official figures of reported incidences of murder, gives an indication of trends over time in reported instances of paternal child killing, what charges were brought, and how it was punished.

### *Charges and Verdicts*

As can be seen from Table 4.9 the most common crime paternal child killers in this sub-sample were charged with was murder (47 per cent of cases). This figure is consistent with findings from the previous sub-samples. However, as with the previous sub-samples, the crime paternal child killers were charged with was not always the same for which they were punished. In well over half (62 per cent) of the murder charges, for which a full run of information from charge to punishment was reported in the newspaper coverage, the paternal child killer was either found insane, guilty of a lesser charge, or not guilty and discharged. Additionally, in this sub-sample paternal child killers were most frequently found 'guilty but insane' (23 per cent of verdicts) suggesting that it was preferable to find the crime an act of insanity than one committed in a fit state of mind. This made the crime more understandable and less threatening than one committed by a father who was conscious of what he was doing, whether this was the reality or not.

Findings from the preceding sub-samples revealed that fathers charged with more than one crime, such as murder and attempted suicide, were only convicted of murder, which is reflected in this sub-sample too (see Table 4.10). This showed sympathy for those charged with murder but also a disinclination to proceed with a less serious charge if the defendant was found guilty of a capital crime. Fathers convicted of murder already faced

death, incarceration in a criminal lunatic asylum, or, if an appeal against the death sentenced was successful, life imprisonment, so it may have appeared inconsequential in terms of punishment to convict them of an additional crime.

Crime Charged With	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Murder	34
Manslaughter	11
Murder and wounding with intent to murder	1
Murder and attempted suicide	2
Murder and attempted murder	5
Murder and counselling, procuring and commanding his wife to murder the child	1
Manslaughter and unlawful possession of guns	1
Unidentified	15
Total	70

*Table 4.9: The crimes men were charged with in England and Wales, 1930-1939*

Original Charge	Verdict	Number of Cases Reported in the Newspapers
Murder	Guilty of murder	6
	Guilty of murder but insane	7
	Guilty of manslaughter	4
	Insane, unfit to plead	2
	Guilty of concealment	1
	Guilty of destroying the body in an endeavour to prevent an inquest	1
	Not guilty	6
Murder and attempted suicide	Guilty of murder but insane	2
Murder and attempted murder	Guilty of murder but insane	2
	Insane, unfit to plead	1
Murder and wounding with intent to murder	Guilty of murder but insane	1
Murder and counselling, procuring and commanding his wife to murder the child	Guilty of being an accessory after the fact and of preventing an inquest	1
Manslaughter	Guilty of manslaughter	3
	Guilty of failing to provide adequate medical care	1
	Not guilty	3
Manslaughter and unlawful possession of gun	Not guilty	1
Unidentified		28
Total		70

*Table 4.10: The original charge in comparison to the verdict for cases tried in England and Wales, 1930-1939*



### *Punishments Imposed*

The punishments imposed on paternal child killers in this sub-sample varied, as with the previous sub-samples. In this sub-sample, sentences ranged from twelve days imprisonment to death, depending on the crime the father was convicted of (see Table 4.11). The most commonly reported punishment for paternal child murder in this sub-sample was detainment during his Majesty's pleasure (23 per cent of cases) for men who were found guilty but insane. Martin Wiener claims that in the Victorian period fathers who killed their own children would more than likely be hanged, as convicted male murderers were almost invariably hanged.<sup>607</sup> Yet in the early twentieth century this does not hold true. In fact, as Cathryn Wilson contends the majority of fathers accused of murdering their child did not suffer the harshest penalty of the law.<sup>608</sup>

Punishments for men convicted of the murder of their child ranged from death to life imprisonment, either in a prison or a criminal lunatic asylum. Of the seven men who were sentenced to death in this sub-sample, two men were reprieved and it was reported in only two cases that the execution was carried out. This, coupled with the fact that seventeen men were found guilty of murder but insane and were detained during his Majesty's pleasure, suggests that a more sympathetic view was taken of the cases. This demonstrates that Jade Shepherd's contention that paternal child killers regularly and successfully pleaded insanity is applicable for the 1930s as well as the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>609</sup> Judicial statistics for the period 1930 to 1939 show that of the 444 people charged with murder in England and Wales 48 per cent were either found guilty but insane or insane on

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<sup>607</sup> M. Wiener, *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness, and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2004), p. 125.

<sup>608</sup> C. Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad? Newspaper and Judicial Representations of Men Who Killed Children in Victorian England, 1860-1900' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: University of Essex, 2012), p. 114.

<sup>609</sup> J. Shepherd, 'Victorian Madmen: Broadmoor, Masculinity and the Experiences of the Criminally Insane, 1863-1900' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Queen Mary University of London, 2013), p. 50.

arraignment, while 34 per cent were sentenced to death.<sup>610</sup> While the figures from cases in this sub-sample don't exactly align with national trends for convictions in murder trials, they do show that fewer men were sentenced to death than were found guilty but insane. Punishments for manslaughter, as well as other non-capital crimes such as neglect, varied from just under a years' imprisonment to seven years' imprisonment due to the severity of the crime the paternal child killer was convicted of, reflecting the role of individual circumstances in each case.

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<sup>610</sup> Judicial Statistics, England and Wales, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers online [accessed November 2017].

Charge	Verdict	Punishment	Number of Cases
Murder	Guilty of murder	Death, execution carried out	2
		Death, commuted to penal servitude for life	2
		Death, outcome unknown	2
	Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	7
	Insane, unfit to plead	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	2
	Guilty of manslaughter	Seven years penal servitude	1
		Five years penal servitude	1
		Eighteen months imprisonment	1
		One year imprisonment	1
	Guilty of concealment	Twelve days imprisonment which meant immediate release	1
	Guilty of destroying the body by fire in order to obstruct an inquest	Three months imprisonment	1
	Not guilty	Discharged	7
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	7
Murder and attempted murder	Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	2
	Insane, unfit to plead	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	2
Murder and attempted suicide	Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	2
	Insane, unfit to plead	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
Murder and wounding with intent to murder	Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until His Majesty's pleasure	1
Murder, counselled, procured and commanded his wife to murder the baby	Guilty of being an accessory after the fact and for preventing an inquest	16 days imprisonment which meant immediate release	1
Manslaughter	Guilty of manslaughter	One year imprisonment	1
		One year imprisonment, with hard labour	1
		Eleven months imprisonment	1
	Guilty of failing to provide adequate medical care	Bound over for twelve months	1
	Not guilty	Discharged	3
	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	4
Manslaughter and unlawful possession of guns	Not guilty	Discharged	1
Charge unknown	Verdict unknown	Punishment unknown	13
Total			70

Table 4.11: Charges, verdicts and punishments for paternal child killing committed in England and Wales, 1930-1939

### *Indictments with Partners*

There were six cases in this sub-sample (8 per cent) in which both the father and mother of the child victim were accused of causing the death of their child. In five of the cases the father and mother were charged with the same crime demonstrating equal culpability for the death of the child. Further, in three cases, for which a full run of information was reported in the newspaper coverage, both parents received the same punishment, again demonstrating that both parents were thought to be equally responsible for their child's death. However, in the case of Frederick Rushworth and Lydia Binks, both parents were sentenced to death for the murder of their newborn child, both appealed against their sentences but Binks's appeal was successful and she avoided the death sentence whilst Rushworth's appeal failed and his execution was carried out. Although it was not explicitly stated in the newspaper reports the reason behind her reprieve, the *Daily Express* revealed that an 'extensively signed' petition had been submitted to the Home Secretary.<sup>611</sup> It was reported several times that Binks did not consent to killing the child and that she wanted to keep it. It can be assumed that because her mental age was judged to be of 'only thirteen years' and she was 'childish and easily led', that this had some bearing on the outcome of her appeal.<sup>612</sup>

Unlike the previous sub-samples in which women tended to receive harsher punishments and, therefore, were ascribed a greater proportion of the blame, women in this sub-sample were deemed to be equally or less culpable than the men involved in the case. The severity of punishments meted out to male and female offenders has been an issue of contention in the history of crime and punishment.<sup>613</sup> On the one hand women were

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<sup>611</sup> 'Woman Saved From Gallows', *Daily Express* (29 December 1934), p. 1.

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>613</sup> See K. Callahan, 'Women Who Kill: An Analysis of Cases in Late Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of Social History*, 46 (2013), pp. 1013-1038, C. Conley, *Certain Other Countries: Homicide, Gender, and National Identity in Late Nineteenth Century England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales* (The Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2007), B. Godfrey, S. Farrall, and S. Karsetdt, 'Explaining Gendered Sentencing Patterns for Violent Men and Women in the Late Victorian

tended punished less severely than men because juries and judges took sympathetic views of their cases because of their gender. However, criminal women, especially those who killed their children, were seen to offend against their very nature, as well as the law, so were thought to require harsher punishment to counteract their contravention of feminine norms.<sup>614</sup> In the case of Rushworth and Binks, Binks benefitted in some ways from her gender, especially because Rushworth was seen to be manipulative and Binks's responsibility for the crime, therefore, diminished.

### 3. Nature of Press Coverage

In this part of the chapter the extent of newspaper coverage per case in the sub-sample is analysed based on 483 articles. The number of newspapers which reported on each case, the number of articles printed per case, the length of articles, and the number of articles printed at each stage of the legal process are examined. This section builds on work done by Judith Rowbotham, Kim Stevenson and Samantha Pegg, who examine how and why different newspapers selected, constructed and presented a particular crime's reportage for popular consumption.<sup>615</sup> Neither Cathryn Wilson nor Alesha Lister, both of whom examine newspaper representations of male child murderers, consider the extent of reporting on paternal child killing. As detailed in the introduction to this chapter, in-depth analysis of newspaper reports of violent crime in the 1930s has not been carried out. However, by examining how much space was given to paternal child killing a clearer picture of how such cases were represented is gained. Newspaper coverage of paternal child killing declined in

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and Edwardian Period', *British Journal of Criminology*, 45 (2005), pp. 696-720, G. Frost, ' "She is But A Woman": Kitty Brown and the English Edwardian Criminal Justice System', *Gender and History*, 16 (2004), pp. 538-560, S. D'Cruze (ed.), *Everyday Violence in Britain, 1850-1950: Gender and Class* (Longman: London, 2000), S. D'Cruze, *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women* (UCL Press: London, 1998), and L. Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1994).

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>615</sup> J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson and S. Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain: Press Reporting and Responsibility, 1820-2010* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2013), p. 9.

the 1930s: articles became shorter and there were fewer per case in the sub-sample. The reasons for the decrease in coverage are explored in this section.

#### *Extent of Reporting on Individual Cases*

In the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample between one and four newspapers were likely to report on each case with no cases receiving coverage from all seven newspapers selected for this study, as is evident in Table 4.12. The newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases of paternal child killing ranged from one article per case to 22 articles in two cases. Most cases received between one and ten articles, as can be seen in Table 4.13. The newspaper coverage per case was also examined according to the number of lines of text per case (see Table 4.14). Individual cases of paternal child killing received less newspaper attention than in the previous sub-samples (1900 to July 1914, August 1914 to November 1918 and 1919 to 1929).

Cases of paternal child killing remained newsworthy but did not receive the same volume of articles or the same amount of detail as in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample (1900 to July 1914). Despite the growth of human interest journalism in the interwar period, paternal child killing did not incite the same intrigue as it did in earlier in the twentieth century. This may have been because many cases of paternal child killing were not interesting enough in comparison to other news stories in circulation. There were only so many stories a newspaper could report on and if cases of paternal child killing did not have enough scandal about them they may not have been appealing to report on.

Additionally, editors may have taken the decision to limit coverage of particularly violent crimes, such as paternal child killing, because other crimes of a more novel nature were being committed. Whilst in the 1920s, paternal child killing had resonance due to concerns about returning soldiers fitting back into family life in the 1930s, cases of paternal child killing took a backseat to more 'exciting' crimes such as gang-related crimes, property

crimes, and motor-crimes.<sup>616</sup> Geoffrey Pearson argues that during the interwar period juvenile lawlessness, such as gambling and violence at football matches, fun fairs, and amusement arcades, became a pressing issue in national newspapers.<sup>617</sup> There was concern that Hollywood cinema was having a demoralising influence on young people and encouraging them to commit low-level crime.<sup>618</sup> The public still had an appetite for drama and violence but not in the form of paternal child killing. Another element of news reporting popular in the 1930s, which influenced the amount of space given to news about violent crime was celebrity gossip columns. Light-hearted news reports about celebrities and figures of note provided titillation and a welcome relief from everyday life. Since official crime figures levelled out in the interwar period and the predicted post-war and post-economic Depression crime wave did not materialise, newspaper editors had no need to warn and scare their readers about an upsurge in crime.

Number of Newspapers	Number of Cases
1	22
2	14
3	16
4	11
5	9
6	3
7	0
Total Number of Cases	75

Table 4.12: The number of newspapers which reported on each case, 1930-1939

<sup>616</sup> See A. Brown, 'Crime, Criminal Mobility and Serial Offenders in Early Twentieth Century Britain', *Contemporary British History*, 25 (2011), pp. 551-568.

<sup>617</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>618</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Number of Articles	Number of Cases
1	16
2	13
3	9
4	7
5	9
6	5
7	3
8	2
9	2
10	1
11	1
12	0
13	0
14	0
15	2
16	1
17	0
18	0
19	2
20	0
21	0
22	2
Total Number of Cases	75

Table 4.13: The number of articles found per case, 1930-1939

Total Number of Article Lines	Number of Cases
Fewer than 10	1
10-19	10
20-29	6
30-39	8
40-49	7
50-59	3
60-69	3
70-79	2
80-89	1
90-99	1
100-149	8
150-199	6
200-249	7
300-349	2
350-399	1
400-449	1
450-499	3
500-599	1
700-799	1
1000-1999	3
Total Number of Cases	75

Table 4.14: The total number of lines per case, 1930-1939



### *Extent of Reporting by Newspaper*

Although the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* reported on the most number of cases of paternal child killing during this period it was the *Daily Express* which published the most articles (see Tables 4.15 and 4.16). The *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* closely followed by the *Daily Express* and the *Daily Mirror* reported on a similar amount of cases, as can be seen in Table 4.15. *The Sunday Times* and *The Observer* were both weekly rather than daily newspapers which explains the low level of coverage of the cases. This was somewhat different to the rest of the period. Those newspapers which reported on the highest number of cases tended to be the newspapers which produced the highest amount of articles about those cases. Broadsheets and popular daily newspapers reported on similar numbers of cases and, apart from the *Daily Express*, published a similar number of articles on paternal child killing.

Newspaper	Number of Cases
<i>Daily Express</i>	40
<i>Daily Mail</i>	34
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	39
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	43
<i>The Times</i>	43
<i>The Observer</i>	4
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	6

Table 4.15: The number of cases reported on by each newspaper, 1930-1939

Newspaper	Number of Articles
<i>Daily Express</i>	172
<i>Daily Mail</i>	62
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	67
<i>Manchester Guardian</i>	79
<i>The Times</i>	85
<i>The Observer</i>	5
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	7

Table 4.16: The total number of articles published by each newspaper, 1930-1939

The newspaper coverage per case was also examined according to the number of lines of text per article which can be seen in Table 4.17. During the period 1930 to 1939, cases of paternal child killing received on average up to 70 lines of text in newspaper articles (see

Figure 4.1 on page 256). In comparison with the previous sub-samples, newspaper coverage of paternal child killing decreased over the period 1930 to 1939. This implies that interest in deaths of children at the hands of their fathers diminished. It also demonstrates that reports in newspaper articles were becoming shorter. Tabloid journalism encouraged short, snappy articles and the size of newspaper articles was further restrained by the amount space given to advertisers.

Lines of Text	Number of Articles
Fewer than 10	43
10-19	113
20-29	66
30-39	43
40-49	34
50-59	24
60-69	17
70-79	7
80-89	9
90-99	9
100-149	10
150-199	5
200-249	3
250-299	1

Table 4.17: The number of lines per article, 1930-1939

Table 4.18, shows that most newspaper articles reported on the police court hearing followed by the trial verdict. Shani D’Cruze *et al.* find that newspapers devoted well over half their space to recording evidence and witness statements but around a third of their space to describing the action of the courtroom.<sup>619</sup> In Table 4.18 it can be seen that D’Cruze *et al.*’s hypothesis also applies to serious crimes as most articles were published either after the police court hearing or after the verdict was given at the assize courts. This evidence also refutes Rowbotham, Stevenson, and Pegg’s contention that it was pre-trial developments that received the most attention in the national newspaper coverage. Less than three

<sup>619</sup> S. D’Cruze, B. Godfrey, and D. Cox, ‘“The Most Troublesome Woman in Crewe”: Investigating Gender, Sentencing and the Late Victorian English Lower Courts’, in E. Avdela, S. D’Cruze, and J. Rowbotham (eds.), in *Problems of Crime and Violence in Europe, 1780-2000: Essays in Criminal Justice* (The Edwin Mellen Press: Lewiston, 2010), p. 243.

quarters of the articles were published after the case had been heard at the police court hearing.

Stage in Criminal Process	Number of Articles
Discovery of the killing	50
Coroner's inquest	52
Police court hearing	92
Trial in progress	64
Trial verdict	86
After the verdict	42

*Table 4.18: The amount of newspaper coverage per stage in the criminal process, 1930-1939*

Figure 4.1 demonstrates how each of these individual elements of reporting, including the use of headlines and sub-headlines, were employed to produce an article on paternal child killing. The news report was written after the second stage in the criminal process, the coroner's inquest, which was highlighted in the sub-headline. The sub-headline also revealed who the victims were and, by inference, who the alleged perpetrator was. The headline, meanwhile, insinuated that the sanity of the accused was in question and also gave a degree of sympathy to the accused and those involved. The main body of the article further discussed the role of the accused's mental health in the case, with just about half of the article being devoted to this, further indicating the interest of the general public in criminal culpability and mental illness. The rest of the article discussed other reasons the father had killed his family, the injuries sustained by the victims, and the finding of the bodies

## TRAGEDY OF A NERVOUS MAN.

### INQUEST ON DEAD WIFE AND SON.

Dr George Cohen held an inquest at Edgware yesterday on the bodies of Mrs. Iva Tuke, forty-five, and James Tuke, fifteen, her son, who were found dead with injuries to the head, apparently inflicted with a hammer in their house in Penshurst-gardens on Wednesday. Mr. William C. Tuke, an accountant, is now in Redhill Hospital, Edgware, suffering from a wound in the throat.

The Rev. Walter Sidney Tuke, of Smallwood Vicarage, Rochdale, said his brother had had nervous breakdowns, the last one that he knew of being about six years ago. "That was a serious one." I understand he was found wandering miles away from his home, and was brought home by friends. Ever since he has been highly strung and nervous." The dead boy was his brother's only son, and he was always talking about him.

The Coroner: Was the lad quite up to the mark mentally?—No.

Did that worry your brother?—It was a tremendous disappointment to him. I know that.

Miss Dorothy Didham, for fourteen years managing clerk in the employ of Mr. Tuke, said he had worried a great deal about business matters. He took things very much to heart, worrying about everybody's affairs.

The Coroner: And his own?—Not so much. He worried about clients' affairs.

"The last week or two," she continued. "Mr. Tuke was very nervous, so much so that he got the skin off his hands through continually rubbing them together. He worried a great deal over his son, who used to come to the office occasionally to do little things. The boy was several years younger than his age mentally."

Miss Didham stated that she spent Tuesday evening with the Tuke family. "He was very nervy when I first went to the house, but he improved. We had a very nice evening and he seemed quite happy. Mr. Tuke had no financial trouble and had worried unnecessarily."

Miss Didham told how she rang up the house at eleven o'clock on Wednesday morning, and, receiving no reply, informed Dr. Moriarty, who with police officers found Mrs. Tuke and her son dead and Mr. Tuke sitting in a car in the garage with his throat cut.

Dr. Hosford, assistant medical officer at Redhill Hospital, Edgware said Mr. Tuke was admitted with a cut throat, apparently self-inflicted with a razor.

"He has since said practically nothing," added Dr. Hosford. "He is very restless, and I don't think he knows what has happened. He has been wondering why his wife and child do not come to see him."

The jury returned a verdict that Mrs. Tuke and her son were murdered by Mr. Tuke.

Figure 4.1: Article of 69 lines, *The Observer* (30 March 1930), p. 22.

#### 4. Editorial Devices

This section examines some of the editorial devices employed to construct the newspaper articles about cases of paternal child killing . Such devices included the headlines and sub-headlines of the articles, discussion of elements of the crime, perpetual novelty, sensationalism, and photographs. While sensational language had been a staple of newspaper reporting from the late nineteenth century, bold headlines and columns became key design elements of a newspaper format that encouraged readers to pick up newspapers. There were changes in design and page layout to make the newspapers more accessible to the reader. In the chapters examining the periods 1914 to 1918 and 1919 to 1929 it was argued that the First World War changed the way in which violent cases of paternal child killing were reported in the newspapers. Newspaper articles came to contain less graphic descriptions of the wounds sustained by child victims because it was thought to be inappropriate and demoralising during the First World War and beyond. This trend continued into the 1920s but by the 1930s these brutal accounts reassumed a central part of the newspaper articles on paternal child killing.

##### *Headlines and Sub-headlines*

As can be seen in Table 4.19, the majority of articles used a specific headline and 63 per cent of articles employed sub-headlines to give further information. Much like the previous sub-samples, relatively few of the cases (5 per cent) were subsumed under a general headline such as 'Crown Court' or 'News in Brief' which discussed several cases tried at one particular court. The articles which were reported under a sub-headline, or did not use either a headline or sub-headline, were usually a filler article or part of a larger section of the newspaper reporting on crime or news of a particular locale. Articles that only used a sub-headline or no headline at all became less frequent between 1900 and 1939. The desire to differentiate each newspaper article with at least a separate headline was much more

apparent. By using a separate specific headline for each article the newspapers became more accessible and individual cases became easier to follow.

Type of Headline	Number of Articles
Specific headline	353
Sub-headline of specific headline	224
General headline	20
Sub-headline of general headline	17
Sub-headline only	2
No headline	20

*Table 4.19: The breakdown of headlines and sub-headlines of each article, 1930-1939*

The content of headlines and sub-headlines was analysed by focussing on the key features of their content. The nine features, as identified by their frequency in the headlines and sub-headlines, were the location of the crime, relationship of the killer(s) to the victim(s), punishment received, reference to murder victim(s), reference to mental illness, occupation of the accused, method of killing, crime committed, and opinion of the newspaper. Many of the headlines and sub-headlines contained a mixture of these features, although some, such as location, did appear alone. The most common elements of the headlines and sub-headlines were the identities of the victim(s), the crime that had been committed, and the relationship of the accused to the victim(s) (see Table 4.20), a finding consistent across the whole sub-sample. In the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample of cases, inclusion of the location of the crime, the occupation of the accused and descriptions of the crime diminished throughout the entire period and were not regular features of headlines and sub-headlines. In 41 per cent of cases mental illness was mentioned in the newspaper coverage of the cases but in only 6 per cent of the headlines and sub-headlines, suggesting that some forms of mental illness were not newsworthy enough to feature in a headline.

Headline and Sub-headline Feature	Number of Headlines and Sub-headlines
Location of the crime	14
Occupation of accused	3
Crime committed	184
Victim(s)	191
Relationship of accused to victim(s)	169
Punishment	48
Insanity	24
Means of killing	73
Description of the crime	37

*Table 4.20: The most common features of headlines and sub-headlines, 1930-1939*

The final part of the headline and sub-headline analysis examines the language used in the headlines. Aside from the factual information conveyed in the headlines and sub-headlines two linguistic devices stand out in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers in this sub-sample: reference to the case as a mystery, tragedy or drama, and emotive descriptions of the child's death. Those headlines that referred to the child victim emphasised the youth of the child by describing the victim as a 'baby', 'child', 'infant', or 'boy'. Such descriptions further underlined the innocence of the victim and the heinous character of the crimes. Another way to stress the terrible nature of the crime was to describe it as a 'tragedy'. Cases were referred to as a 'tragedy' usually with a preceding adjective such as 'family', 'domestic', 'mansion', or 'triple' to further define a particular feature of the crime, such as the location or number of victims. Other cases were referred to as a 'drama' or 'dramatic' to highlight that this instance of paternal child killing was particularly newsworthy and to draw attention to the article in the newspaper.

Those headlines and sub-headlines which referenced the sanity of the paternal child killer provided a description of the father using adjectives such as 'insane', 'demented', 'raving lunatic', or 'nervous'. Other headlines used descriptive phrases which alluded to the sanity of the father such as 'kills it in a passion', 'mental age of eight', 'man's release from mental hospital', 'new-moor fear', 'asylum defence', 'judge and arithmetical test on sanity question', and 'man who was in padded cell'. Use of these terms was not restricted to

cases in which the accused was found 'guilty but insane' and were frequently employed prior to the case going to trial, before any official medical testimony was heard on the individual's state of mind. Newspapers often came to their own conclusion regarding the state of mind of a paternal child killer, due to the nature of the crime, lay testimony pertaining to the perpetrator's sanity, and the fact that it fitted a certain narrative and would make a compelling story. Many of the headlines and sub-headlines included the legal outcome of the trial such as 'guilty but insane' or 'insanity verdict in Herts tragedy'. No medical terms were used in the headlines and sub-headlines in reference to the sanity of paternal child killers indicating that such descriptions were less compelling and less likely to be intriguing to the reader. Phrases such as 'guilty but insane' were more understandable and instantly conveyed the outcome of the trial as well as issues of responsibility.

### *Elements of the Killing*

One of the central elements of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers was the way in which the child was killed and subsequently died and this remained a constant feature throughout the entire period 1900 to 1939. The most common method of killing in this sub-sample was of a physical and violent character such as drowning (15 per cent of cases), strangling (14 per cent of cases), and inflicting a head injury (11 per cent of cases). There were also 6 per cent of cases in which a less direct method of killing caused the death of the child, such as lack of medical attention, starvation, and neglect. As with the previous sub-samples paternal child killers used a range of weapons, such as razors, guns, knives, and hammers. The way in which fathers killed their children did not change much over the 40-year period. Cases of neglect did diminish, due to a greater emphasis on child wellbeing, educating parents, and public health measures to eradicate childhood disease, but violent means of killing remained prominent.



In the newspaper coverage of cases in the previous two sub-samples (August 1914 to November 1918 and 1919 to 1929) descriptions of how the child victims were killed were less graphic than in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample (1900 to July 1914) so it would be expected that descriptions in this sub-sample would follow this trend. However, many of the descriptions were just as vivid and emphasised the violence of the acts, as in the first sub-sample. In the 1930s, there was a return to more graphic accounts of wounds, although not with the same level of detail as in the pre-war period. Clive Emsley contends that the twentieth century witnessed an enormous growth in what was permissible for the media to report, describe and show.<sup>620</sup> However, while this helps to explain why graphic reports of child victims' injuries featured regularly in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing in the periods 1900 to July 1914 and 1930 to 1939 it does not account for the disappearance of these kind of descriptions between 1914 and 1929. Perhaps Emsley was referring more broadly to the twentieth century and the general relaxation of strict rules which had governed polite society for decades.

Some of the articles depicted graphic attacks such as a 'large wound across the throat, the windpipe being severed', 'heads battered', 'terrible injuries to their heads', 'blood streaming from her head', and 'badly gashed and their throats cut'. References to the weapon used by the father were also prominent in the newspaper coverage. William Yeoman shot his son, and then 'clubbed him over the head with the butt end of the weapon so violently that the rifle was shattered'.<sup>621</sup> Andrew Beers 'took an ice-pick and hammered it through his daughter's brain'.<sup>622</sup> The victims of Henry Dennis, the local butcher, were 'found dead with their throats cut and heads battered at their home'.<sup>623</sup> In a further morbid detail it was noted that 'the killing was done on parallel lines to those used in slaughtering animals'

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<sup>620</sup> Emsley, *Crime and Society in Twentieth Century England*, p. 109.

<sup>621</sup> 'Devon Shooting Tragedy', *The Observer* (8 May 1932), p. 19.

<sup>622</sup> 'Father's Right to Kill', *The Sunday Times* (13 July 1930), p. 13.

<sup>623</sup> 'Mother and Children Found Dead', *Daily Express* (12 August 1933), p. 14.

and that 'all of them were stunned before they were killed', just as an animal would be.<sup>624</sup>

These striking descriptions of the injuries received by child victims indicate that readers enjoyed these salacious details and that such descriptions were used to draw in readers to the articles. With the passage of time from the end of the First World War it became once more acceptable to relay intimate and gory details about the death of child victims to newspaper readers. Although the amount of space given to paternal child killing in English national newspapers diminished, in comparison with the newspaper coverage of cases in the periods 1914 to 1918 and 1919 and 1929, appetite for the gory details increased. This discrepancy suggests that by the 1930s not only had enough time had passed for it to become acceptable to print details of violent crimes but that journalists had become adept at picking out elements of a case guaranteed to interest readers, hence the inclusion of graphic details of wounds. In recognition that there was competition from radio news and other national, as well as local newspapers, all vying for reader attention, journalists enhanced the entertainment aspect of their newspapers.<sup>625</sup>

### *Perpetual Novelty*

Perpetual novelty took one of several forms; an overt statement that the incidence was one of an exceptional character, a description of the event as a drama or a tragedy, or it was implicit in the article. In all three instances the author of the article did not even hint at the fact that there were numerous other cases of a similar nature being reported in national newspapers. This suggests that journalists and editors consciously wrote about men killing their children as if this rarely occurred. It also clearly demonstrates the very nature of news-reporting in presenting these acts as one of a kind crimes: to encourage readers to read the article and come back to the newspaper for more information. The form perpetual novelty

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<sup>624</sup> 'Triple Murder Charge', *Daily Mirror* (17 November 1933), p. 8.

<sup>625</sup> Rowbotham, Stevenson and Pegg, *Crime News and Modern Britain*, p. 117.

took changed during the period 1900 to 1939. In the first sub-sample the exceptional nature of the crime was emphasised and in the later sub-samples the dramatic or tragic nature of the case was highlighted. Phrases such as ‘there has been a fourth death in connection with the recent domestic tragedy’ or ‘a mother’s terrible story of the death of her only child’ were more common in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample rather than exaggerated descriptions of how exceptional the crime was.<sup>626</sup> Over-the-top proclamations about the exceptional nature of a particular crime, which drew on the traditions of Victorian melodrama, were becoming out-dated. Instead clearly defined, bold headlines, short and snappy articles, and graphic descriptions of child victims were used instead of dramatic language.

### *Sensationalism and Public Reaction*

This section examines cases of paternal child killing which noticeably attracted more newspaper coverage than the average case as well as cases which provoked a reaction from the public. As John Carter Wood argues the 1920s and 1930s were a golden age for press spectacles due to increasing literacy, advances in printing technology, and expanding consumer opportunities that gave newspapers unprecedented social, political and economic influence.<sup>627</sup> However, it was in the first sub-sample of cases in which the most sensational cases can be found. Sensational cases were not just those that received the most newspaper attention but depended on perceptions of normality. These cases were not the most violent or gory but they all had elements of the unusual and shocking about them. These cases demonstrate that sensationalism in this period was the result of an element of the unusual as well as the newspapers themselves creating excitement around them. The three cases under discussion in this section all received attention for very different reasons.

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<sup>626</sup> ‘Fourth Death’, *Manchester Guardian* (5 June 1930), p. 7 and ‘Child’s Death on Christmas Day’, *Manchester Guardian* (30 December 1930), p. 6.

<sup>627</sup> J. Carter Wood, *“The Most Remarkable Woman in England”: Poison, Celebrity and the Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2012), p. 68.

One of the cases that received a lot of newspaper coverage was that of George Kitchen, who was charged with the murder of his son by shooting him. Kitchen claimed that he did not shoot his son but that his dog, Prince, knocked the gun causing it to fire. Prince was described as 'a strong dog, inclined to get excited', providing evidence of how the dog was likely to make the gun go off.<sup>628</sup> Suspicion was raised by Kitchen's story, however, as he was seen running from the scene, and he and his son were reportedly 'not always on good terms'.<sup>629</sup> Further, the lawyer for the prosecution contended that 'the gun could only have been discharged by human agency'.<sup>630</sup> At Kitchen's trial his dog was brought to the Old Bailey as a 'witness' which excited attention in the newspaper coverage.<sup>631</sup> Kitchen's version of events was believed and he was eventually acquitted with the *Daily Mail* commenting that the whole case was 'pure speculation'.<sup>632</sup> Interest and intrigue in this case was evidently aroused because a dog was accused of the crime. After Kitchen's acquittal there were several newspaper articles which reported that there had been inquiries from the public about buying Prince.

Another case which received a significant amount of newspaper coverage was that of Thomas Davidson, who was charged with the murder of his son. His seven-year-old boy went missing on 21 December 1933, although it appears that an inquiry into his disappearance was not launched for another eight months. Davidson himself claimed at the Police Court hearing that he pushed his son into a canal and then buried the body in a 'burning refuse dump' which, according to the police, would have 'obliterated any trace of the child's body'.<sup>633</sup> An appeal for information regarding the missing boy was broadcast on behalf of Scotland Yard but Davidson's trial proceeded without a body. Davidson was found guilty of the child's murder and was sentenced to death. Because there was no body, and

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<sup>628</sup> 'Smallholder Found Shot', *The Times* (27 January 1932), p. 6.

<sup>629</sup> 'Mystery of Who Fired a Gun', *Daily Mail* (27 January 1932), p. 6.

<sup>630</sup> 'Smallholder Found Shot', *The Times* (27 January 1932), p. 6.

<sup>631</sup> 'Dog as Witness', *Daily Mail* (12 April 1932), p. 9.

<sup>632</sup> 'Jury Stop Case', *Daily Mail* (13 April 1932), p. 16.

<sup>633</sup> 'Murder Trial With No Body', *Manchester Guardian* (19 September 1934), p. 6.

therefore no evidence, there was 'keen discussion' at the Old Bailey and among legal authorities, a detail relayed by the press.<sup>634</sup> A letter was even printed in the *Daily Mail* about the legality of charging Davidson with the murder of his son without the body being recovered.<sup>635</sup> The author of the letter, J. C. Mortimer, cited Hale's Rule, written by Lord Chief Justice Sir Matthew Hale in 1671, in which he stated 'I would never convict any person of murder or manslaughter, unless the fact were proved to be done, or at least the body found dead'.<sup>636</sup> The letter concluded with the comment that Davidson's trial 'proves that there can be sufficient evidence to convince a jury of a person's guilt outside of Hale's conditions'.<sup>637</sup> Davidson appealed against his sentence in the Court of Criminal Appeal but his appeal was dismissed. Possibly because of the controversy the case created, the Home Secretary advised the King to reprieve Davidson and his sentence was commuted to penal servitude for life.<sup>638</sup>

The final selected case to catch the attention of the public and the newspapers was that of James Bellwood, who was accused of throwing his daughter from a moving train. His daughter was found dead on a train line with head injuries and Bellwood was charged with her murder.<sup>639</sup> Bellwood claimed that his daughter fell out of the train after playing with the door handle while he was looking through the opposite window. The train carriage door from which the child fell was even brought into court so that the judge and jury could see how it opened. Newspaper journalists and editors seemed determined to paint Bellwood as a guilty man. Several articles referred to his lack of employment as well as his unhappy relationship with his wife, providing motives as to why he would carry out such a crime. His unemployment was never viewed sympathetically indicating that there were some circumstances under which unemployment, even as the result of the economic Depression,

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<sup>634</sup> 'Death Sentence But No Body', *Daily Mail* (19 September 1934), p. 11.

<sup>635</sup> 'Murder Without a Body', *Daily Mail* (17 October 1934), p. 12.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>638</sup> 'Murderer Reprieved', *Daily Mirror* (26 October 1934), p. 8.

<sup>639</sup> 'Father Charged With Murder', *Manchester Guardian* (23 March 1934), p. 9.

would not provoke a friendly reaction from the public. This was also evident in an editorial written by James Douglas for the *Daily Express* which suggested that Bellwood had committed the crime and that those witnesses who testified in Bellwood's favour did so because they pitied him.<sup>640</sup> Douglas wrote 'in this dreadful case the misery of the father was put forward as a motive for the murder of the child he had loved and nursed'.<sup>641</sup> Because Bellwood and his wife were not living together, he was out of work, and he was burdened with the care of his little child, he was regarded as a potential murderer. These were usually factors which provoked sympathy in the general public, underlining how no two cases of paternal child killing were viewed in the same way. His version of events was, however, believed and he was found not guilty and was discharged.

### *Inclusion of Images*

In the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample there were twenty-one images, all of which were photographs, accompanying articles or alongside a piece of text (see Table 4.21). In 95 per cent of the photographs in this sub-sample the subject was personal. Only one photograph was coded as institutional, that of a judge who presided over one of the paternal child killer's trial (see Table 4.22).<sup>642</sup> The judge in question, Justice McCardie, was quite a controversial English judge known for his 'judicial creativity' and his belief that the law must move with the times.<sup>643</sup> Of those photographs coded as personal 47 per cent were pictures of the offender, 38 per cent were pictures of the victim, and in the final 13 per cent the picture was of a family member (and in one case the family pet). Claire Wardle also finds

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<sup>640</sup> James Douglas was a British newspaper editor, author and critic who edited the *Sunday Express* until 1931.

<sup>641</sup> 'The Man Who Was Saved By Kindness', *Daily Express* (10 May 1934), p. 12.

<sup>642</sup> See the 'Methodology' chapter for a discussion as to how the images were coded, p. 64. In each category an open-ended sub-category of 'other' was included for pictures which did not fit into the other sub-categories. For those coded as personal this included a photograph of a dog, and a picture of a mother and father with their victim.

<sup>643</sup> A. Lentin, *Mr Justice McCardie (1869-1933): Rebel, Reformer, and Rogue Judge* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle, 2016), p. 2.

that there was an overwhelming reliance on personal images during the 1930s.<sup>644</sup> In the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample 45 per cent of all photographs were published in the *Daily Mirror*, 36 per cent were printed in the *Daily Express*, and 18 per cent were printed in the *Daily Mail* (see Table 4.23). This is not surprising given that the *Daily Mirror* branded itself as an illustrated paper, after its brief hiatus as a women's paper, and the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* were both characterised by human-interest stories.

Placement in Newspaper	Total Number
Accompanies article	18
In picture gallery section	1
Separate to article	0
Picture only	2
Front cover	0

Table 4.21: Placement of image in the newspaper coverage, 1930-1939

Subject of Visual	Sub-Category of the Image	Total Number
Personal	Offender(s)	7
	Victim(s)	10
	Family	2
	Other	2
Institutional	Offender in prison	0
	Offender with policeman	0
	Offender in court	0
	Police	0
	Judge	0
	Lawyer	0
	Other	0
Environmental	Location of crime	0
	Home of victim	0
	Home of offender	0
	Other	0

Table 4.22: Subjects and sub-categories of the images used in the newspaper coverage, 1930-1939

<sup>644</sup> C. Wardle, 'Monster and Angels: Visual Press Coverage of Child Murders in the USA and UK, 1930-2000', *Journalism*, 8 (2007), p. 268.

<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Total Number</b>
<i>Daily Express</i>	8
<i>Daily Mail</i>	4
<i>Daily Mirror</i>	9
<i>The Manchester Guardian</i>	0
<i>The Times</i>	0
<i>The Observer</i>	0
<i>The Sunday Times</i>	0

*Table 4.23: Total number of images per newspaper, 1930-1939*

Many of the photographs relating to cases in the whole sample in which the alleged perpetrators were depicted were formal head-shots in which the father was smartly dressed. They don't look threatening or even capable of murdering their child. A good example of this is a photograph used in the newspaper coverage of Peter Tennant (see Figure 4.2) who murdered his two children before committing suicide. In the photograph Tennant is dressed in his army uniform, his hair is slicked back, and he appears to be at work. Contrasted with that image is the photograph used in the newspaper coverage of James Bellwood (see Figure 4.3). The photograph of Bellwood is taken straight on and shows only his face, much like a police mugshot. Despite maintaining that his daughter fell out of a train carriage due to a faulty door, journalists were intent on depicting Bellwood as a guilty man (see Page 269). Several articles referred to his lack of employment as well as his unhappy relationship with his wife, providing motives as to why he would carry out such a crime.





*Figure 4.2: Photograph of Peter Tennant, Daily Mirror (19 September 1935), p. 3.*



*Figure 4.3: Photograph of James Bellwood, Daily Express (10 May 1934), p. 13.*

## **5. Understandings of Mental Illness**

The final section of this chapter examines the way in which the sanity of paternal child killers in this sub-sample was represented in the newspaper coverage. This section looks at personal accounts of mental breakdown, lay evidence, the testimony of medical experts, and legal understandings, as well as medical and non-physical causes of mental illness. Newspaper accounts of paternal child killing allow access to a range of different understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. They also demonstrate how newspapers selected evidence relating to mental illness and criminal culpability and how this was presented for readers to understand. In 41 per cent of cases the mental health of the accused was mentioned in the newspaper reports. This refers to the individual alluding to some form of mental illness, witness testimony on the individual's mental wellbeing, invocation of the insanity plea at trial, and medical testimony on the individual's sanity. Conversely, in only 5 per cent of cases in the sub-sample the explanation, as reported by the newspapers, was said to be a breakdown in mental health. In comparison with the previous sub-samples this is a much smaller percentage, especially when compared with the number of men found guilty but insane.

Trial transcripts from the Old Bailey are not available for the period 1930 to 1939 but insights made in the third chapter for the period 1900 to 1913 can be applied to this chapter. Analysis of the Old Bailey trial transcripts revealed that journalists selected the evidence given by medical experts based on whether it would be understandable to a general readership. Medical evidence was selectively reported in the newspapers and usually consisted of whether the medical expert thought the accused was insane at the time of the crime. The analysis also showed that journalists did not always include medical evidence in the newspaper articles despite at least one expert testifying on the subject. Although journalists did not record verbatim the testimony of medical experts in the newspaper articles, what they did include was just as revealing. In the newspaper coverage

of cases in this sub-sample in which the defendant's mental health was in question, more space was given to the testimony of medical experts than in the first sub-sample covering the period 1900 to July 1914.

In the early- to mid-twentieth century, attempts were made by medical professionals to remove the stigma from mental illness and prevent the onset of chronic forms of mental illness. The 1930 Mental Treatment Act included provision for voluntary treatment, outpatient work and the abolition of older terminology, such as replacing 'asylum' with 'mental hospital'.<sup>645</sup> It did not repeal the 1890 Lunacy Act but provided another system to parallel it. The 1920s and 1930s also saw the development of concepts of mental illness which posited immediate personal, economic and social circumstances as the key to understanding breakdowns in mental health. However, Mathew Thomson claims that although the First World War challenged existing assumptions about the polarity between insanity and health, the idea that breakdowns in mental health were related to a weak mental or physical constitution persisted.<sup>646</sup> Further, Janet Weston contends that although psychological strands of thought were accepted by some medical professionals, these accompanied rather than took over from biological approaches.<sup>647</sup> Hereditarian views of mental illness exerted a continued influence on psychiatric diagnoses into the early twentieth century.<sup>648</sup> As in the previous sub-samples physical causes as well as personal, social and economic factors were highlighted as having had an impact on the defendant's mental health. This was not new to the 1930s. It had long been recognised by lay witnesses, medical experts, legal professionals, and paternal child killers themselves that breakdowns in mental health were caused by a range of factors, not all of them physical.

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<sup>645</sup> Walke, 'Repute and Remedy', p. 16.

<sup>646</sup> M. Thomson, *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture, and Health in Twentieth Century Britain* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2006), p. 185.

<sup>647</sup> J. Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System and Sexual Crimes in England, 1919-1960s: Diagnosing Deviance* (Bloomsbury Academic: London, 2018), p. 60.

<sup>648</sup> Walke, 'Repute and Remedy', p. 36.

### *Personal Accounts of Breakdowns in Mental Health*

Paternal child killers provided testimony on their own state of mind both in the build up to killing their children and during the act through statements to the police at the scene of the crime or at the police station, conversations with medical experts whilst awaiting trial, or to their lawyer. Their thoughts indicate how they viewed their own state of mind at the time they killed their children and how they wanted their actions to be perceived. Such defendants might have been aware that telling a particular kind of story about their mental health was likely to generate sympathy both in the press and during their trials. Many emphasised the sudden nature of their actions and their inability to control their behaviour. One father, Herbert Stokes, claimed that he 'must have lost [his] head' when he murdered his son. Sidney Strand said that 'a passion came over [him]' when he killed his son and that he couldn't remember what happened.<sup>649</sup> Similarly, Herbert Duffin claimed that 'something came over him' and that 'he had no intention of doing any harm to the child'.<sup>650</sup> Andrew Beers, however, alleged that he killed his daughter due to 'an irresistible impulse' and that he could not 'control' himself, employing medico-legal jargon to describe his actions.<sup>651</sup>

These personal accounts also highlighted circumstances fathers attributed to their breakdown in mental health. Herbert Duffin asserted that he was 'absolutely fed up with life' and he wished the 'Germans had shot [his] head off instead of [his] arm'.<sup>652</sup> Although it was not revealed why he was 'fed up' with his life, his phrasing suggests that he may have been feeling suicidal. His desire to have been killed during the First World War and reference to his army service in the newspaper coverage of this case implies that life for Duffin post-war may have been a struggle. Walter Howick claimed he was consumed with the idea of killing his son because he had been out of work for ten months and he was bereaved due to

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<sup>649</sup> 'Father on Murder Charge', *Manchester Guardian* (21 June 1930), p. 13 and 'Father Accused', *Daily Mirror* (12 June 1930), p. 24.

<sup>650</sup> 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

<sup>651</sup> '“Mercy Murder” by Father', *Daily Mail* (14 July 1930), p. 12.

<sup>652</sup> 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

the death of another child a year prior to the crime. Both Duffin and Howick's testimony, and its inclusion in the newspaper coverage, demonstrated an awareness that circumstances outside of an individual's control had adverse and unforeseen effects.

Although both Stokes and Strand used more colloquial expressions to describe their state of mind at the time they killed their children, most of the personal accounts betray a more legalistic understanding of responsibility for their actions, implying that their accounts had been mediated through their lawyers during their trials. By claiming that they either did not know what they were doing or why they were doing it, their accounts addressed the McNaughtan Rules.<sup>653</sup> Paternal child killers did not interpret their state of mind at the time of the crimes in medical terms but favoured a legal perspective, presumably because this was thought to have more sway with the jury and judge in bringing about a finding of guilty but insane. Newspaper journalists focused on the personal, social, and economic factors paternal child killers ascribed to their breakdown in mental health, reflecting wider changes regarding the cause of mental illness. For the reader these individual circumstances pinpointed the cause of mental illness, replacing the physical indicators previously ascribed to breakdowns in mental health.

### *Lay Evidence*

Neighbours, policemen, family members, and friends of a paternal child killer provided evidence, either at trial or to the journalist reporting on the case, on his mental state prior to killing his child or immediately after. Character witnesses were vital to insanity trials because they supplied examples of supposedly insane behaviour and long-standing mental health problems.<sup>654</sup> Testimony given by lay witnesses on the mental health of paternal child killers focussed on physical changes, behaviours, and symptoms. As with the previous sub-

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<sup>653</sup> For a discussion of the McNaughtan Rules see the 'Literature Review' chapter, Footnote 150.

<sup>654</sup> J. Eigen, *Witnessing Insanity: Madness and Mad-Doctors in the English Court* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1995), p. 24.

samples, lay portrayals of a paternal child killer's mental health could be broad and often consisted of short descriptions, such as 'seemed to be demented', 'strange in his manner', 'strange, excitable disposition', 'very excited', 'nervous and agitated', and 'vacant'.<sup>655</sup> In one description, a relieving officer who had known Joseph Millard for over two years said that although he was 'morose and sullen', he would not regard him as a 'mental case'.<sup>656</sup> No further details were given in the newspaper coverage intimating that newspaper editors assumed their readers had basic knowledge of what a 'mental case' looked like.<sup>657</sup>

Those accounts that did not rely upon physical indicators highlighted the role personal circumstances were thought to play in the breakdown of mental health. In an attempt to find any plausible explanation for the crime, old head injuries, wounds, and illnesses were used as evidence as to why the accused suffered a mental breakdown. Charles Whiting's father thought that a possible explanation for his son's murder of his family lay in a wound Whiting received during the Battle of Jutland that had caused him to suffer from continual headaches.<sup>658</sup> Headaches were not a visible affliction so it can be assumed that Whiting himself had complained to his father about his headaches for nearly twenty years and perhaps had a fear that his headaches were a sign of something more sinister. In a similar vein Topley Dexter's mother stated that her son had had a fall three years prior to killing his two children and that his mental health had become significantly worse as a result.<sup>659</sup> In the newspaper coverage of cases in the previous three sub-samples, testimony given by lay witnesses on the mental health of paternal child killers solely concentrated on physical indicators of mental illness. By the 1930s journalists also included evidence regarding personal, social and economic factors that could have caused mental illness,

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<sup>655</sup> 'Charge of Murdering Wife and Children', *The Times* (31 May 1932), p. 10 and 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

<sup>656</sup> 'Insane Murderer Inquiry', *Daily Mirror* (14 December 1933), p. 9.

<sup>657</sup> Millard's case also highlights another official who had knowledge of people with a mental health problem. Relieving officers were responsible for administering relief to the poor who were likely to have been those with mental health issues.

<sup>658</sup> 'Jutland Wound Tragedy', *Daily Mail* (6 March 1936), p. 11.

<sup>659</sup> 'Triple Murder Charge', *The Times* (26 July 1939), p. 11.

broadly mirroring changes in medical thinking concerning both the role of biological and socio-economic factors in the maintenance of mental health.

### *The Testimony of Medical Experts*

A total of twenty-two medical experts were reported to have testified at the trials of ten paternal child killers in this sub-sample, and one piece of 'medical testimony' from an unnamed expert was also cited (see Table 4.24 and 4.25). However, as Table 4.26 shows, it was not always reported that medical evidence was given in every trial, even when the outcome was 'guilty but insane'. This calls into question the extent to which medical experts were relied upon to make a judgement about a defendant's sanity and the extent to which their testimony was required in order for a defendant to be found insane. It is conceivable that a verdict of guilty but insane could have been reached without testimony by a medical expert. Tony Ward states that there was no legal requirement for medical evidence in order to establish that a defendant was insane but it was rare for the issue to be raised without medical evidence and even rarer for it to be raised successfully.<sup>660</sup> However, as has been argued in the previous three chapters, just because medical testimony was not reported in the newspaper articles does not mean medical evidence was not given at the trials of other men in this sub-sample. Journalists did not include all pieces of medical testimony given during a trial in their accounts of proceedings and highly edited the content of that which they did report. It demonstrates that inclusion of medical testimony in the newspaper coverage was not always thought necessary to the narrative constructed in the newspaper article.

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<sup>660</sup> T. Ward, 'Psychiatry and Criminal Responsibility in England, 1843-1939' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: De Montford University Leicester, 1996), p. 61.

Number of Medical Experts Reported to Have Testified	Number of Cases
1	3
2	2
3	2
4	1
5	1
Unspecified	1
Total	10

Table 4.24: Number of medical experts reported to have testified, 1930-1939

Verdict	Number of Cases
Guilty of murder	1
Guilty of murder but insane	7
Insane, unfit to plead	2
Total	10

Table 4.25: Verdict of cases in England and Wales in which medical testimony was given on an individual's sanity, 1930-1939

Punishment	Number of Cases	
	Medical Testimony Reported	No Medical Testimony Reported
Death, outcome unknown	1	3
Death, execution carried out	0	2
Death, commuted to penal servitude for life	0	2
Ordered to be detained during his Majesty's pleasure	9	9
7 years penal servitude	0	1
5 years penal servitude	0	1
2 years imprisonment	0	1
18 months imprisonment	0	1
1 year imprisonment	0	1
1 year in the second division	0	1
Bound over for 1 year	0	1
11 months imprisonment	0	1
3 months imprisonment	0	1
16 days imprisonment which meant immediate release	0	1
12 days imprisonment which meant immediate release	0	1
Discharged	0	10
Total	10	37

Table 4.26: The outcomes of trials according to punishment and reported medical testimony in cases in which insanity was invoked, 1930-1939



The medical experts who testified on the mental health of paternal child killers in this sub-sample had similar occupations to those in the first three sub-samples (see Table 4.27).

None of the medical experts who testified in the trial of one paternal child killer were reported to have testified at the trial of another man in the sub-sample so there was no opportunity to compare the outcomes of trials in which the same medical expert gave evidence. Additionally, the information concerning whether the medical expert testified for the defence or prosecution or even whether the medical expert conclusively thought that the defendant was sane or not was sparsely reported in the newspaper coverage.

<b>Title of Medical Expert</b>	<b>Number Reported in the Newspaper Coverage</b>
Prison medical officer	5
Asylum medical superintendent	2
Assistant medical officer at an asylum	2
Doctor	11
Specialist in mental diseases	2
Unidentified	1
Total	23

*Table 4.27: The number of experts referred to in the newspaper coverage, 1930-1939*

The standard piece of medical testimony reported in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers whose sanity was in question detailed whether the expert thought the defendant was insane at the time. Sometimes this would be all their testimony was edited down to in the newspapers. For example Dr Stoddart, a private practitioner who examined Leonard Harding whilst he was being held at Brixton Prison, came to the conclusion that Harding was insane at the time he committed the crime.<sup>661</sup> Similarly, in the case of Topley Dexter, Dr Humphrey, presumed to be a general practitioner since his speciality was not specified, said that Dexter was insane on the day of the tragedy and was still in that condition.<sup>662</sup> Only one line containing the most basic of information pertaining to the mental health of the paternal child killer was given to medical testimony in the newspaper coverage.

<sup>661</sup> 'Father's Double Crime', *The Sunday Times* (20 November 1932), p. 21.

<sup>662</sup> 'Unfit to Plead', *The Times* (10 November 1939), p. 5.

The McNaughtan Rules were referred to in the newspapers' edited version of medical testimony given at the trials of paternal child killers but not to the same extent as in the first sub-sample. In the newspaper coverage of cases in the period 1900 to July 1914, journalists focussed heavily on phrases taken from the McNaughtan Rules used to judge a person's sanity at the time of a crime. By the 1930s journalists seemed to be much more concerned with reporting the terminology used by medical experts testifying on mental health, particularly regarding the form of mental illness the defendant was thought to be suffering from and the symptoms of mental illness observed. Greater space was also given to more detailed pieces of medical testimony. Reader appetite for medical knowledge about mental illness in relation to criminal culpability increased over the 40-year period. When compared with the amount of space given to lay testimony, journalists concentrated more on medical evidence. It also indicates that journalists and editors assumed their readers had a basic knowledge regarding mental illness. Symptoms of mental illness and some pieces of specialist medical terminology were becoming of interest to the everyday person. This is reflective of a modernising society in which knowledge about the self was increasingly desired.

Where fuller accounts of medical experts' testimony were reported in the newspaper coverage the language used was more technical and medical, as in the third sub-sample covering the period 1919 to 1929. Technical definitions and medical phrasing replaced colloquial terminology and lay understandings. This was a change from the first sub-sample in which medical testimony reflected a blend of lay and legal testimony with few references to specific mental health problems. The language used, and types of mental illness put forward, in the medical testimony in this sub-sample were not as wide and varying as Joel Eigen describes for the period 1760 to 1913.<sup>663</sup> However, in the medical testimony reported in the newspapers there was a definite shift from lay understandings to

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<sup>663</sup> J. Eigen, *Mad-Doctors in the Dock: Defending the Diagnosis, 1760-1913* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2016), p. 5.

a focus on medical concepts. In the Australian context, Georgina Rychner also finds that use of widely accessible language used by medical experts to describe insanity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shifted to professional terminology as the fields of psychiatry, psychology and criminology were consolidated in Australia.<sup>664</sup>

The newspaper coverage of paternal child killers whose sanity was questioned demonstrated that there were conflicts over the boundaries of medical understandings of mental illness in the testimony of medical experts themselves. One such case was that of William Yeoman who murdered his wife and three children. Dr Roy Craig, described as a mental specialist, stated that he could find no trace of insanity in Yeoman. He did, however, believe that his mental age was eight after testing Yeoman's arithmetical capabilities and finding that he could not multiply or divide.<sup>665</sup> The judge presiding over the trial disputed the validity of this comment, noting that it conveyed nothing on the question of insanity as 'a great many people...cannot divide or subtract'.<sup>666</sup> Dr Hugh Grierson, the medical officer of Brixton Prison, also gave evidence at Yeoman's trial. In agreement with Dr Craig he thought that Yeoman's 'general manner was childish'.<sup>667</sup> The final medical expert reported to have given testimony at Yeoman's trial, Dr Twining, a private practitioner, described him as a 'heavy, mentally defective animal type'.<sup>668</sup> Whilst the testimony of Dr Craig and Dr Grierson hinted at the possibility of Yeoman being mentally deficient Dr Twining in no uncertain terms deemed him to be in the most severe category of mental deficiency. The lack of consensus as to the severity of Yeoman's condition indicates how subjective definitions of mental health could be.

As was evident in the medical testimony reported in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first and third sub-samples, attempts to determine a defendant's state of mind

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<sup>664</sup> G. Rychner, 'Temporary Fits, Animal Passions: Insanity in Victorian Capital Trials, 1890-1935', *Health and History*, 20 (2018), p. 33.

<sup>665</sup> 'Shot Family', *Daily Mirror* (22 June 1932), p. 5.

<sup>666</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>667</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>668</sup> 'Hospital Murder', *Daily Mail* (22 June 1932), p. 12.

at the time a crime was committed, as well as their criminal culpability, were not straightforward. The lack of coherent responses to mental illness can be seen in the case of Herbert Duffin, who murdered his daughter. One of the medical experts who testified at Duffin's trial, Dr George Bowman, a private practitioner, thought that he murdered his daughter whilst suffering from 'impulsive insanity' but that the question of responsibility was difficult to determine.<sup>669</sup> Dr Bowman stated that all the 'common characteristics' of homicidal mania appeared in this case and these characteristics were then listed in the newspaper coverage ('no accomplices, an insufficient motive, the victim his own child, and no attempt to conceal the particulars of the crime').<sup>670</sup> This was one of only a handful of cases in the whole sample in which a clear set of criteria was articulated by a medical expert in their testimony and printed in the newspaper coverage. These criteria give an insight into how the concept of homicidal mania was regarded and what was thought to be an indicator of insanity. However, because the inclusion of such detail was a rare occurrence it is difficult to determine whether this was a standard definition widely employed by medical experts in mental illness.

To complicate matters further, in Duffin's case two more medical experts gave conflicting testimony which confirmed the legal findings of Dr Bowman's testimony but not all of his medical conclusions. Dr Stanley Shannon, medical officer of Strangeways Prison, testified that although he regarded Duffin as 'exceedingly unstable' mentally, he had seen no 'definite indication of mental disease'.<sup>671</sup> He did, however, agree that Duffin was the type of man who would act on impulse and that this 'insane impulse' was due to a 'diseased brain'.<sup>672</sup> Dr Shannon also agreed with Dr Bowman as to the legal implications of Duffin's state of mind and thought that Duffin knew what he was doing but did not completely

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<sup>669</sup> 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

<sup>670</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>672</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

recognise the wrongfulness of the action.<sup>673</sup> The final, reported, piece of testimony came from Dr Alexander Sturrock, who had a specialist mental health clinic at Salford Royal Hospital as well as a private practice. He agreed with Dr Bowman and Dr Shannon that Duffin had acted on an insane impulse and that he did not recognise the quality of the crime.<sup>674</sup> As was the case with William Yeoman, the medical testimony reported in the newspaper coverage of Herbert Duffin was probably more confusing than it was illuminating to the average lay reader and varied as to what type of mental health problem the defendant was suffering from.

### *Legal Understandings*

Testimony on the sanity of paternal child killers also came from lawyers, both for the defence and prosecution. There were no cases in this sub-sample, unlike the previous sub-samples, in which the judge's comments were included in the newspaper coverage. Much of the legal evidence addressed, unsurprisingly, the legal aspects of the case, such as whether the defendant was insane at the time of the crime and whether he knew right from wrong. Some lawyers drew on the individual character of the defendant and used examples of their past behaviour to question whether their action in killing their child could be deemed insane. The lawyer for the prosecution of Joseph Millard's case said that the murders were committed in a way which could not be associated with a man in sane mind, especially a man like the prisoner who had 'hitherto borne a good character'.<sup>675</sup> Similarly, Walter Howick's defence lawyer questioned whether a man could be sane 'who deliberately sets out to kill two of his own children whom he dearly loves'.<sup>676</sup> This was a question implicit in much of the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers since killing one's own child was not a 'normal' act to carry out.

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<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>675</sup> 'Man's Release from Mental Hospital', *The Times* (6 December 1933), p. 11.

<sup>676</sup> 'Silk Stocking Saves Father From Double Charge of Murder', *Daily Express* (22 October 1935), p. 7.

### *Physical Causes of Mental Illness*

This section explores physical causes of mental illness, as reported in the newspaper coverage, of paternal child killers whose sanity was in question. The causes and circumstances behind each paternal child killer's breakdown in mental health were never exactly the same. Some of the theories which were prominent in the previous sub-samples, such as the influence of hot climates, head injuries, and heredity insanity, did not feature in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample. The lack of reference to certain causes of mental illness may also have been due to the fact that these particular causes were becoming outdated. However, there were psychological and somatic disorders which were gaining traction in contemporary thinking but did not appear in the newspaper coverage of this sub-sample. Freudian and Jungian theories of the unconscious, for instance, were not referenced in the newspaper articles. It is clear that journalists selected understandings of mental illness which they themselves could comprehend as well as their readers.

The first concept to explore is degeneration and the interlinked category of mental deficiency. Degeneration was often seen as a cause of mental deficiency which is why the two are examined together. Despite psychological interpretations and the growing importance of socio-economic factors in explaining breakdowns in mental health, biological theories remained central to some understandings of mental illness in the 1930s. Additionally, renewed interest in eugenics, which had been popular among some medical professionals during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, helps to explain the persistence of degeneration as an explanation as to explain why certain fathers killed their children.<sup>677</sup>

There were three cases in this sub-sample which drew on the theory of degeneration to explain why the paternal child killer acted in such a way and why they had had a breakdown in their mental health. In all three cases it was reported that medical

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<sup>677</sup> G. Schaffer, *Racial Science and British Society, 1930-1962* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2008), p. 4.

experts put forward these ideas during the defendant's trial. All three of the medical experts, reported to have testified at the trial of William Yeoman, made a comment about Yeoman's mentality, some in more pointed terms than others.<sup>678</sup> The second case in which the mentality rather than the sanity of the paternal child killer was raised was that of Herbert Duffin. Dr Alexander Sturrock, who had a mental health clinic at Salford Royal Hospital as well as a practice in Manchester, said when he examined Duffin he found him physically normal but to be suffering from poor nutrition.<sup>679</sup> He also commented that Duffin had a 'very high palate' which he believed was a 'sign of a degenerate mental stock'.<sup>680</sup> A number of medical writers in the early twentieth century suggested a link between mental aptitude and physical form, although some were wary about drawing firm diagnostic or prognostic conclusions from the presence of physical stigmata.<sup>681</sup>

Although not as prevalent in this sub-sample, references to the effects of a previous illness on mental health were made in the newspaper coverage. It was not always explicitly linked to the mental health of the father nor was it overtly connected to their crimes. However, its very inclusion in the newspaper coverage alongside other explanatory factors, such as a breakdown in mental health, suggests that the three were related. It was reported that William Yeoman was stated to have been 'ill about two months' prior to murdering his wife and two children while Herbert Duffin had undergone numerous operations from which he suffered great pain.<sup>682</sup> In only one case, that of Charles Howe, was his illness unquestionably connected to a perpetrator's ability to judge that killing his child was against the law. Howes himself claimed that he had 'neuralgia and toothache so badly that [he] did

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<sup>678</sup> For a full account of the medical testimony given see Page 283.

<sup>679</sup> 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

<sup>680</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>681</sup> M. Jackson, 'Images of Deviance: Visual Representations of Mental Defectives in Early Twentieth Century Medical Texts', *The British Journal for the History of Science*, 28 (1995), p. 319.

<sup>682</sup> 'Devon Shooting Tragedy', *The Observer* (8 May 1932), p. 19 and 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

not realise what [he] was doing. The pain was awful and [he] had a headache as well'.<sup>683</sup> In Howes's mind his headache and toothache were in part responsible for his murder of his son.

In six of the cases (8 per cent) in this sub-sample it was reported that the paternal child killer was suffering from depression, or melancholia, prior to killing his children. In some cases newspapers simply described the paternal child killers as 'depressed' while in others much more detail was provided about the cause of their depression. It was reported that Herbert Stokes suffered from melancholia while Frank Williams had been 'depressed of late' with no further information given about their conditions.<sup>684</sup> In contrast, Walter Howick was depressed because of the death of a daughter three months prior to the murder of his son.<sup>685</sup> According to the *Daily Express* 'Little Joan was his favourite child and her death depressed him very much', a point repeated in several articles on the case undoubtedly to bring him sympathy and illuminate the state of his mental health in the build up to the crimes.<sup>686</sup> Depression and melancholia were consistently reported to be causes of mental illness throughout the period 1900 to 1939 indicating its significance as an explanatory factor in breakdowns of mental health.

Delusions also featured as a cause of mental illness in this sub-sample. Joseph Millard believed that the doctors at Dudley Road, the mental health care facility where he was a patient, had conspired to kill him and thought that the nurses were trying to inject germs into his body to make him insane.<sup>687</sup> It was also reported by a medical expert that Millard was suffering from 'delusional insanity'.<sup>688</sup> Andrew Bagley, meanwhile, was

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<sup>683</sup> 'Pulling a Child's Ear', *The Sunday Times* (6 April 1930), p. 23.

<sup>684</sup> 'Drowned Baby in Pool', *Manchester Guardian* (8 July 1930), p. 21 and 'Father and Child Tragedy', *Daily Express* (13 June 1933), p. 1.

<sup>685</sup> 'Father Committed for Trial', *The Times* (12 October 1935), p. 4.

<sup>686</sup> 'Silk Stocking Saves Father From Double Charge of Murder', *Daily Express* (22 October 1935), p. 7.

<sup>687</sup> 'Man's Release from Mental Hospital', *The Times* (6 December 1933), p. 11.

<sup>688</sup> 'Murders by Released Raving Lunatic', *Daily Mirror* (6 December 1933), p. 32.



reportedly under a delusion that he was being pursued because he was in debt.<sup>689</sup> As Sally Alexander and Barbara Taylor argue psychotic delusions have affected people for centuries but their contents vary greatly according to their cultural setting.<sup>690</sup> In the newspaper coverage of cases in the first and third sub-samples, fears of unemployment featured in the delusions of paternal child killers, as did persecution and protection of their family. Financial difficulties featured with regularity in the delusions of paternal child killers throughout the period 1900 to 1939. The centrality of financial provision to fatherhood and masculinity during this period cannot be understated. Fathers internalised their role as provider to the extent that it affected their mental health and this was put forward in both their trials and the newspaper coverage to explain why they killed their children and why their mental health had faltered.

In one case it was reported that the paternal child killer, William Tuke, suffered a nervous breakdown prior to murdering his wife and son. It was stated during his trial that Tuke had suffered multiple nervous breakdowns, the last serious one being six years prior to the crime.<sup>691</sup> During this particular breakdown he was found wandering miles away from his home and, according to his brother, he had been ‘highly strung and nervous’ ever since.<sup>692</sup> Linked to his nervous breakdown in the newspaper coverage was Tuke’s tendency to worry about financial matters, his clients’ business affairs, and the health of his son, who was ‘several years younger than his age mentally’ and who he feared would ‘never make a living’.<sup>693</sup> So connected was financial provision to masculinity that it caused a father extreme anxiety about his son’s economic future.

The phrase ‘nervous breakdown’ was used infrequently in the newspaper coverage of cases in the whole sample across the period 1900 to 1939. Mathew Thomson states that

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<sup>689</sup> ‘Court of Criminal Appeal’, *The Times* (26 January 1937), p. 5.

<sup>690</sup> S. Alexander and B. Taylor, ‘Introduction’, in S. Alexander and B. Taylor (eds.), *History and Psyche: Culture, Psychoanalysis, and the Past* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2012), p. 7.

<sup>691</sup> ‘Tragedy of a Nervous Man’, *The Observer* (30 March 1930), p. 22.

<sup>692</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>693</sup> ‘Tragedy of a Nervous Man’, *The Observer* (30 March 1930), p. 22.

nervous breakdown had continuing popular appeal; it gave a socially acceptable meaning to suffering rather than the stigma of mental illness.<sup>694</sup> Thomson argues that the language of nervous diseases was still popular in the 1930s because it provided a material basis for mental deterioration.<sup>695</sup> It was used in one case in the period 1900 to July 1914, in three in the period 1920 to 1929, and in two cases in the period 1930 to 1939. This was usually in cases in which the person in question was middle class. Tuke, who was an accountant, fitted this pattern. By reporting his acute anxiety over matters beyond his control, his unfathomable actions were rendered more palatable. Tuke's case underlines the centrality of financial worries to mental breakdown and how damaging the pressure to provide could be for some men, even those who, by all accounts, were financially stable.

Suicidal behaviour was seen as cause and effect of mental illness in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample. In thirteen cases (16 per cent) the paternal child killer committed suicide after killing his child and in a further six cases (7 per cent) he attempted to take his own life. Although these figures are somewhat lower than the previous sub-samples, they nevertheless demonstrate the connection between paternal child killing and suicide. In eight cases of paternal child killing followed by suicide (10 per cent) and five cases of attempted suicide (7 per cent) the sanity of the paternal child killer was mentioned in the newspaper coverage. In only one case of paternal child killing followed by attempted suicide was a breakdown in mental health reported to be the explanation for the crime. However, as can be seen in Table 4.28, in four cases the father was found guilty of murder but insane whilst another was found insane and unfit to stand trial. This highlights that newspaper journalists were less likely to assign cases of paternal child killing followed by attempted suicide as a mental health issue despite it legally being found to be so. Of the cases in which

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<sup>694</sup> M. Thomson, 'Mental Hygiene in Britain during the First Half of the Twentieth Century: The Limits of International Influence', in V. Roelcke, P. Weindling, and L. Westwood (eds.), *International Relations in Psychiatry: Britain, Germany, and the United States to World War Two* (University of Rochester Press: Rochester, 2010), p. 144.

<sup>695</sup> Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, p. 163.

the paternal child killer committed suicide after causing the death of his child in only one case did the coroner's jury at the inquest return a verdict of 'felo-de-se'.<sup>696</sup> The eight other men, for whom information was available, were either determined to be insane, temporarily insane, or of unsound mind at the time of the crimes.

Verdict	Punishment	Number of Cases
Guilty of murder but insane	Ordered to be detained until his Majesty's pleasure	4
	Insane, unfit to plead	1
Unidentified		1
Total		6

Table 4.28: The verdicts and punishments of men who attempted suicide after killing their children in England and Wales, 1930-1939

### *Non-Physical Causes of Mental Illness*

In this section of the analysis non-physical causes of mental illness are examined. Factors such as the paternal child killer's experiences in the First World War, unemployment, financial difficulties, and grief were consistently used to explain why fathers experienced a breakdown in their mental health. Despite the fact that by the end of this period the First World War had ended over twenty years ago, men's experiences in the First World War were still drawn upon and referenced in the newspaper coverage, not always to explain their crimes but to gain sympathy from the readers and offer an insight into their mental health. This is almost the opposite of what Ginger Frost finds in her study of ex-soldiers who murdered their illegitimate children. Frost argues that by 1925 war service played little part in the newspaper coverage of such cases due to the time lag between the end of the war and the crime, which lessened the impact of war service.<sup>697</sup> Joanna Bourke also argues that ex-servicemen lost the sympathy of the public and politicians due to a desire to forget the

<sup>696</sup> 'Felo-de-se' refers to an act of illegal suicide, i.e. one in which the perpetrator was deemed sane when he committed the act.

<sup>697</sup> G. Frost, ' "Such a Poor Finish": Illegitimacy, Murder and War Veterans in England, 1918-1923', *Historical Reflections*, 42 (2016), p. 103.

war and its effects.<sup>698</sup> This chapter shows that in the newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing army service was employed well into the 1930s to provide some explanation as to why a father would kill his child, much like unemployment or grief.

There were six men in this sub-sample who were reported to have served in the army during the First World War. Although this only amounts to 7 per cent of the sub-sample the fact that their war service was still being referred to in the newspaper reports demonstrates the lasting resonance the conflict had. Indeed, several historians have shown that ex-soldiers of the First World War were still suffering from war trauma well into the 1930s.<sup>699</sup> Further, in the early 1930s 36 per cent of ex-servicemen in receipt of a disability pension were listed as 'psychiatric casualties'.<sup>700</sup> For men who fought in the First World War the long-lasting effects of their experiences were highlighted, particularly those who had had a negative war experience, such as being a prisoner of war, or suffered from a war-induced mental illness. It was reported that Herbert Stokes 'had been a changed man since the war, during which he was taken prisoner'.<sup>701</sup> Emile Chatanet had also been a prisoner of war in Germany for two years during which he was badly treated and it was reported that these experiences 'preyed on his mind' and caused him to have nightmares.<sup>702</sup> Herbert Duffin, as discussed above, said that he wished the 'Germans had shot his head off instead of his arm' and that his life since the war had been a 'struggle'.<sup>703</sup> Jessica Meyer contends that ex-soldiers who continued to suffer symptoms of mental illness after several years of treatment and those who broke down after the Armistice were seen as lazy idlers

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<sup>698</sup> J. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Reaktion Books Limited: London, 1996), p. 70.

<sup>699</sup> K. Bogaert, ' "Due to His Abnormal Mental State": Exploring Accounts of Suicide Among First World War Veterans Treated at the Ontario Military Hospital at Coburg, 1919-1946', *Social History*, 51 (2018), pp. 99-123, M. Robinson, ' "Nobody's Children?": The Ministry of Pensions and the Treatment of Disabled Great War Veterans in the Irish Free State, 1921-1939', *Irish Studies Review*, 25 (2017), pp. 316-335, S. Grogan, *Shell Shocked Britain: The First World War's Legacy for Britain's Mental Health* (Pen and Sword History: Barnsley, 2014), B. Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists 1914-1994* (Jonathan Cape: London, 2000), and Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>701</sup> 'Drowned Baby in Pool', *Manchester Guardian* (8 July 1930), p. 21.

<sup>702</sup> '3 Children Shot by a Father', *Daily Mirror* (2 March 1932), p. 4.

<sup>703</sup> 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

attempting to rely on the state for support rather than sufferers of wartime traumas.<sup>704</sup> In the newspaper coverage of ex-soldiers who killed their children this was not the case. The mention of their army service gave the reader background information as to what could have led these men to kill their children and, in cases in which their mental health had been affected, shed light on why this was.

Only one father in this sub-sample had been diagnosed with a war-related mental health condition prior to his killing his children. Peter Tennant, who murdered his two daughters before committing suicide, was said to be suffering from neurasthenia at the time he committed the crimes.<sup>705</sup> Neurasthenia was one of several diagnoses given to soldiers who were psychologically affected by their experiences in war. It was also reported that Tennant had scars on each side of his head which he got after being wounded while on active service. *The Times* claimed the scars 'may have had a bearing on his presumed mental state' as they caused him 'terrible pain', underlining the presumed relationship between physical and mental health.<sup>706</sup> The newspapers were not shy about attributing Tennant's breakdown in mental health to his war service, and by extension, the murder of his children: his war service and neurasthenia were mentioned in twelve out of the fifteen articles found on the case. As Susan Kingley Kent contends many veterans could not throw off the sights and sounds of their war service well into the 1920s, and as this case illustrate some ex-soldiers continued to experience traumatic symptoms almost two decades after the First World War ended.<sup>707</sup> The somewhat vague phrasing of the impact the war had on the paternal child killers suggests that journalists assumed their readers were aware that army service in the First World War had repercussions for mental health and did not need to

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<sup>704</sup> J. Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Palgrave Macmillan: Hampshire, 2009), p. 99.

<sup>705</sup> 'Father and Child Missing', *The Times* (17 September 1935), p. 16.

<sup>706</sup> 'Man and Two Daughters Dead', *The Times* (21 September 1935), p. 3 and 'Two Children Drowned by Their Father', *The Times* (25 September 1935), p. 9.

<sup>707</sup> S. Kingsley Kent, *Aftershocks: Politics and Trauma in Britain, 1918-1931* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2008), p. 28.

elaborate. Additionally, war service was considered virtuous and a fulfilment of patriotic duty and this would have lent sympathy to ex-soldiers who killed their children.

Without the trial transcripts of cases in this sub-sample it is difficult to argue with certainty the extent to which army service played a role in the sentencing decisions of juries and judges of ex-soldiers who killed their children. However, the newspaper coverage does allow some investigation. Two of the paternal child killers described as ex-soldiers were found guilty but insane and sentenced to death and one father was sentenced to death but later had his sentence reprieved to one of penal servitude to life. Further, two men who committed suicide after murdering their children were found to have been of unsound mind when they carried out their crimes. That five out of the six ex-soldiers were found to be insane suggests that army service had an effect on the verdicts made by judges, juries, and coroners and the punishments given to men who killed their children. In many of the articles reporting on ex-soldiers who killed their children, their army service was included in the paragraph which dealt with potential mitigating factors in the case. The detail drew reader attention to the fact that there was an explanation for the father's actions. Although reference to a paternal child killer's service in the First World War in two cases was invoked in a couple of sentences with not much further detail, army service became short hand for unspeakable horror and was a way of suggesting that the man in question should receive some level of sympathy.

Unemployment and financial difficulties were prominent non-physical causes of mental illness in the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample. Cathryn Wilson contends that poverty and insanity became entrenched within the discourse of paternal child murder and by the end of the nineteenth century poverty was understood as one of the principal causes of male insanity.<sup>708</sup> While Wilson's findings also hold true for many of the cases in my entire sample, the period 1930 to 1939 shows that it was not just poverty

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<sup>708</sup> Wilson, 'Mad, Sad, or Bad?', p. 32.

that had an effect on the mental health of fathers but unemployment, both short- and long-term, underemployment, financial loss, and financial uncertainty. In 28.5 per cent of cases the paternal child killer was unemployed at the time he killed his children and in a further 8 per cent of cases financial difficulties were reported to be the reason behind his actions. Although unemployment and straitened financial circumstances were used to explain paternal child killing throughout the period 1900 to 1929, the number of unemployed men nearly doubled during the period 1930 to 1939 due to the economic Depression of 1929 to 1933.<sup>709</sup>

Paternal child killing in the wake of a period of unemployment or underemployment sheds light on the centrality of financial provision to fatherhood and the extent to which this was thought to have an effect on mental health. There was an unspoken acceptance of the central role of financial provision to fatherhood during the early twentieth century, despite women's employment and the state's increasing economic provision for families.<sup>710</sup> In the 1930s many fathers could not provide for their families due to high levels of unemployment. This was difficult for men who took their role as provider seriously and had crucial consequences for fatherhood and masculinity.<sup>711</sup> While paternal child killing subverted the paternal duties of providing and protecting, it was also an example of carrying out these duties to their extreme. For these men it was more merciful to kill their children than allow their children to live in poverty or with the shame of having a father who could not financially provide for them.

The recognition that unemployment could have negative effects on mental wellbeing was not new in the 1930s. As Akihito Suzuki contends, for labourers in the mid-nineteenth century, anxiety rooted in poverty and unsteady work was a reality, and grief over economic losses and unemployment loomed large, as did psychological strains caused

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<sup>709</sup> This is based on a comparison made with the three previous further sub-samples of cases covering the period 1900 to 1929.

<sup>710</sup> King, *Family Men*, p. 29.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

by stressful domestic situations.<sup>712</sup> However, the scale and duration of unemployment in the 1930s aroused considerable concern about the damage it did to the physical and mental wellbeing of its victims.<sup>713</sup> In reference to physical health Charles Webster argued that the economic Depression must be regarded as a significant exacerbating factor, tending to worsen prevailing low levels of health.<sup>714</sup> Webster, however, did not examine the effects of unemployment and associated health problems, such as malnutrition and high infant and maternal mortality, on the mental health and wellbeing of both the unemployed and their dependants. From the newspaper coverage of unemployed men who killed their children it is clear that it was not just physical health which was affected by adverse economic conditions. Unemployment also had a severe toll on mental health.

In the newspaper coverage of cases in this sub-sample the connection between unemployment and paternal child killing, and unemployment and a breakdown in mental health, was based on evidence given by the paternal child killer himself as well as lay witnesses. It was not reported that medical experts who testified at the trials of paternal child killers attributed breakdowns in mental health to unemployment. Of course, this part of their testimony may have been excluded from the newspaper articles as journalists only included snippets of expert testimony in newspaper reports. However, it was recognised by medical officials in the early 1930s that lack of employment and financial worries affected the psychological wellbeing of the unemployed. This was commented upon by George Newman, the Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, in his annual report for the year 1932. As well as affecting the physical condition of the unemployed and their dependants, Newman suggested that an indirect effect of the economic Depression was fear

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<sup>712</sup> A. Suzuki, 'Lunacy and Labouring Men: Narratives of Male Vulnerability in Mid-Victorian London', in R. Bivins and J. Pickstone (eds.), *Medicine, Madness and Social History: Essays in Honour of Roy Porter* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2007), p. 121.

<sup>713</sup> S. Constantine, *Unemployment in Britain Between the Wars* (Longman Group Ltd: London, 1980), p. 4.

<sup>714</sup> C. Webster, 'Healthy or Hungry Thirties?', *History Workshop*, 13 (1982), p. 125.



of unemployment.<sup>715</sup> Although Newman could find no evidence of widespread physical degeneration in the medical reports submitted by regional Medical Officers of Health, he did warn that there was a possibility that unemployment put people at risk of mental instability.<sup>716</sup> It was reported that unemployed adult men with large families dependant on them had a tendency to 'mental depression bordering on neurasthenia.'<sup>717</sup> Newman also commented on the fact that deaths by suicide had greatly risen in the early 1930s. He attributed this to the 'pressure of troubles of the times', referring to the economic Depression.<sup>718</sup>

The fact that the unemployment of paternal child killers was mentioned in the newspaper coverage indicates that this was thought to be a significant detail, which helped to explain the act, and, in cases in which an insanity plea was raised, had a bearing on mental health. In the case of Herbert Duffin his lack of employment was categorically stated to be the reason he murdered his daughter. It was reported in the *Manchester Guardian* that the 'shadow of unemployment had come across his life' and there was 'no possible doubt' that his inability to maintain his wife and child in comfort had finally 'unhinged his mind'.<sup>719</sup> In Duffin's case his inability to provide for his children had an effect on his mental health and failure to live up to expectations affected his ability to see any other way out of his current situation other than killing his family.

Long-term unemployment put working class families especially under severe pressure and for some men it was the hopelessness of long-term unemployment, characteristic of the 1930s, which made life unbearable.<sup>720</sup> Charles Whiting, who was found dead in his house along with his wife and two children, had been unemployed for about a

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<sup>715</sup> G. Newman, *Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer* (1932), p. 16.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>718</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>719</sup> 'Crown Court', *Manchester Guardian* (9 May 1933), p. 6.

<sup>720</sup> R. McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), p. 156.

year and it was reported that the family's 'resources were coming to an end'.<sup>721</sup> The coroner at Whiting's inquest said that unemployment had depressed Whiting, suggesting a motive for the crimes and further tightening the connection between mental wellbeing and the ability to provide.

Not all men who experienced financial difficulties were unemployed. Some were in employment but were anxious that their earnings were not enough to sustain their family. For example, the defence set up for Henry Dennis was one of 'insanity due to financial worries'.<sup>722</sup> Similarly, it was reported that money matters 'preyed on' Emile Chatanet's mind until the last day of his life.<sup>723</sup> Charles Taylor, meanwhile, was 'driven frantic' by his economic downfall and because he could not provide for his children as well as he would like.<sup>724</sup> Both Taylor and Dennis had working class occupations (a miner and a butcher) while Chatanet was lower middle class (a dress designer) demonstrating that men of different occupations and class status were affected by the expectations placed upon them to provide financially. All three of these cases highlight the connection between financial position and mental wellbeing but also demonstrate concern felt by fathers about being unable to provide for their families in an adequate way not just provision of the bare essentials. There was not only the pressure to provide but to provide relative to social status, emphasising the centrality of economic provision to masculinity and fatherhood.

Grief remained a constant non-physical cause of mental illness in cases of paternal child killing across the entire sample, and in this sub-sample it was no different. Although it was reported that only two men were deeply affected by the loss of a loved one this is still significant since it demonstrates the recognition that grief had an effect on mental health during this period. However, it must also be noted that expressions of sorrow were socially

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<sup>721</sup> '4 of Family Found Dead', *Daily Mirror* (3 March 1936), p. 8.

<sup>722</sup> 'Triple Murder Charge', *Daily Mirror* (17 November 1933), p. 8.

<sup>723</sup> '3 Children Shot by a Father', *Daily Mirror* (2 March 1932), p. 4.

<sup>724</sup> 'Miner Kills Four Children', *Daily Mirror* (28 June 1934), p. 10.

constrained, especially for men who were expected to show emotional strength.<sup>725</sup> This means that reference to a paternal child killer's grief as an explanation for their crimes as well as their mental breakdown may have been made because such expressions of grief were uncommon among men and, therefore, seemed like unusual reactions rather than a natural response to the death of a family member. Charles Taylor had been 'greatly distressed' due to the death of his wife and child six months prior to the murder of his four children and subsequent suicide.<sup>726</sup> Walter Howick lost his daughter three months prior to the murder of his son.<sup>727</sup> The *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express* reported that Howick killed his child while suffering from depression following the death of his favourite daughter, explicitly linking his actions to his mental state.<sup>728</sup>

## Conclusions to Chapter Six

The history of violent crime in the 1930s is relatively under-researched. In this chapter it has been argued that men convicted of the murder of their children were treated more leniently by being found guilty but insane than they were at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although newspapers are an imperfect source for addressing trends in the punishment of crime due to the fact they did not report on every that went to trial, in the absence of court records they can give an indication of how violent criminals were punished in the 1930s. When viewed alongside judicial statistics for England and Wales for the period 1930 to 1939, the punishment of paternal child murderers fits the pattern of punishment for murder more generally. As Janet Weston contends, opinion was divided over the efficacy of traditional punishments, such as the death sentence, resulting in increasing recourse to medical

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<sup>725</sup> P. Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914-1970* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2010), p. 85.

<sup>726</sup> 'Miner Kills Four Children', *Daily Mirror* (28 June 1934), p. 10.

<sup>727</sup> 'Father Committed for Trial', *The Times* (12 October 1935), p. 4.

<sup>728</sup> 'Father Guilty But Insane', *Daily Mail* (22 October 1935), p. 6 and 'Silk Stocking saves Father From Double Charge of Murder', *Daily Express* (22 October 1935), p. 7.

professionals to determine the state of mind of defendants.<sup>729</sup> This appears to have been the case for men in the sub-sample used for this chapter. Whilst there was not a reported increase in the number of medical experts in mental illness called to testify at the trials of paternal child killers, there was an increase in the number of guilty but insane verdicts.

This chapter has also argued that there was a greater desire for medical knowledge about mental illness and criminal culpability. In the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers whose mental health was in question more space was given to medical testimony than it was to lay evidence. Additionally, the testimony of medical experts was not condensed down to whether the defendant was insane at the time he killed his child. Journalists also included the type of mental illness the medical witness thought the defendant was suffering from and the reasons for this conclusion. Focus on medical interpretations of mental illness and criminal culpability, rather than lay or legal understandings, indicates that the general readership of national newspapers during the 1930s had an increased appetite for medical knowledge. The general public were becoming more educated and the First World War had provided an impetus for knowledge about mental illness. In the previous three chapters covering the period 1900 to 1929, medical testimony was beginning to be differentiated in the newspaper coverage from that of lay witnesses. By the 1930s journalists provided their readers with much more detail regarding medical insights into mental illness and criminal culpability.

As has been argued in the last three chapters, inability to provide financially was a key explanation put forward in the newspaper coverage as to why men killed their children. Because economic provision assumed such a central role in early twentieth century conceptualisations of masculinity and fatherhood, the connection between the three seemed to intensify over the period 1900 to 1939. Whereas in the earlier periods unemployment or fear of financial ruin were included as a biographical detail, in the 1930s

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<sup>729</sup> Weston, *Medicine, The Penal System, and Sexual Crimes*, p. 15.

these factors were readily recognised as a reason for killing one's own child and provided insight into why a man might suffer a breakdown in mental health. The powerful rhetoric of 'father as provider' should not be underestimated, especially in a decade when the number of men thrown into unemployment for lengthy periods was unheard of in England and Wales. It was not just the fear of poverty which affected mental health but changes in economic circumstances.

Finally, it has been demonstrated in this chapter that the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing had changed quite dramatically by the end of the 1930s. National newspaper coverage of cases of paternal child killing was shorter in the 1930s than at the beginning of the twentieth century. Despite the fact that there was a rise in human interest journalism in the 1930s, there was less coverage and more concise articles relating to cases of paternal child killing. This suggests that interest in reporting on this type of crime diminished. When the contents of the articles were analysed it was revealed that graphic descriptions of how the child victims had died were included with regularity. This disconnect between shorter newspaper coverage but heightened interest in the violence of the act indicates that in many ways cases of paternal child killing were still used as a form of entertainment, despite diminishing interest in graphic elements of the killings in the periods 1914 to 1918 and 1919 to 1929. As newspaper articles became briefer, due to the volume of other newsworthy topics, journalists had to make the content of their articles as compelling as possible.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to analyse representations of cases of paternal child killing in the English press in the early twentieth century, with a particular focus on understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability. The research was carried out to determine how paternal child killers were represented as fathers and family men, how violent crime and its punishment was represented to the general reading public, the way in which mental illness and criminal culpability were reported for public understanding, and to examine how the national press changed over time. This thesis has made extensive use of a selection of seven English national newspapers and six main themes have been explored throughout this thesis: representations of paternal child killer; the way in which violent crime was treated; the centrality of understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability to newspaper reports of cases of violent crime; the importance of economic provision in explaining paternal child killing; the role of wartime experiences in cases of ex-soldiers who killed their children; and the association between suicide (or suicide attempts), mental breakdown, and paternal child killing.

Using the newspaper reports of 402 cases of paternal child killing has allowed for the close investigation of how the national press represented such cases. It has permitted analysis of the structure of these articles, what information was included and what was excluded, identification of particular points of interest, and what the overall character of such reports was. Newspaper articles, unlike court records indicate the type of information presented to the wider public and available for them to consume.<sup>730</sup> Further, they show how readers were to make sense of such information. Newspapers were one of a few ways to receive information about events happening locally, nation-wide, and further afield. Editors

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<sup>730</sup> Adrian Bingham and Martin Conboy estimate that by the early 1950s around 85 per cent of the population saw a paper every day. See A. Bingham and M. Conboy, *Tabloid Century: The Popular Press in Britain, 1896 to Present* (Peter Lang Limited: Oxford, 2015), p. vii.

chose the stories their readers would consume and journalists decided how they would frame such stories.

More often than not paternal child killers were treated sympathetically but there was no standard reaction and no way to predict how a case would be dealt with in court and in the press. Many articles treated cases of paternal child killing as entertainment whilst others reported on them in a very matter-of-fact way. Paternal child killing was not represented in the national press as a panic-inducing crime in the way that infanticide was asserted to be in the 1860s.<sup>731</sup> There remained variation in the types of men that killed their children. Some were out-of-work miners while other were businessmen who were worried about the impact of the Depression in the 1930s, others still were grieving husbands, ex-soldiers, affectionate fathers, or men with a history of violent behaviour. Responses to paternal child killing were characterised by variation in the first sub-sample, but by the 1930s there was less variability in the way in which paternal child killing was punished and in how it was reported in the newspapers. Violent crime remained a staple of national newspaper coverage but by the end of the interwar period the coverage was much more concise and the case had to resonate with the public in order to be included.

The newspaper coverage of paternal child killing indicated that violent crime, more specifically paternal child murder, was treated more leniently over the period. In the first sub-sample the number of men sentenced to death (12 per cent) and the number of men who were detained during his Majesty's pleasure in a criminal lunatic asylum (14 per cent) were about equal. There was also evidence in the period 1900 to July 1914 that recourse to the death sentence was waning as it was reported that only six of the twenty-four men sentenced to death actually had their sentence carried out. Further, it was reported in 62 per cent of cases in which the defendant was sentenced to death that the jury

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<sup>731</sup> See D. Grey, '“Liable to Very Gross Abuse”: Murder, Moral Panic and Cultural Fears Over Infant Life Insurance, 1875-1914', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 18 (2013), pp. 54-71. Grey contests the idea that financially-motivated infanticide represented a true 'moral panic' in late Victorian Britain and argues that it was a failed attempt to provoke a cultural anxiety about the extent of this practice.

recommended the accused to mercy. Four of these men (16 per cent) had their sentences reprieved. In the second sub-sample it was reported that in 47 per cent of cases the defendant was sentenced to death and there were no findings of guilty but insane. Half of the men sentenced to death were recommended to mercy, all of whom later had their sentences reprieved. The trend towards less severe punishments continued in the period 1919 to 1929. It was reported that 21 per cent of men in the sub-sample were found guilty but insane while 12 per cent of men were sentenced to death. Half of the men sentenced to death were recommended to mercy and it was reported that of these five men two had their sentences reprieved. By the 1930s there were proportionately more cases of paternal child murder that resulted in a finding of guilty but insane. In sixteen cases (23 per cent) the defendant was found guilty but insane and was detained in a criminal lunatic asylum and seven men (10 per cent of cases) were reportedly punished with the death sentence, of which two defendants had their sentences commuted and only two men were executed.

The punishments reported in the newspaper coverage relating to the sample fit the pattern of judicial statistics for the punishment of murder in the period 1900 to 1939. Violent crime became more psychologised over the period 1900 to 1939 and there was more willingness, and perhaps desire, to find paternal child killing an act committed by a man who was insane. There were more guilty but insane verdicts by the end of the 1930s due to changes in the nature of punishment of violent crime, its purpose and the public's decreased appetite for hanging murderers. This was because paternal child killing needed to be understood, explained, and made sense of. No one in their 'right mind' would kill their own children, especially if there was evidence of previous loving behaviour.

Understandings of mental illness and criminal culpability became more central to the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing over the period 1900 to 1939. Medical testimony and discussions of insanity were framed and interpreted in terms of lay and legal understandings in the period 1900 to July 1914. This was done in order to make it more



accessible to a general readership and journalists heavily mediated medical testimony given during assize trials. The testimony of medical experts had to be interesting enough to make it into the articles, and what constituted 'interesting' changed over time. In the period 1900 to July 1914, the legal implications of medical testimony were of more importance to journalists and readers than the type of mental illness. During the First World War discussions of mental illness practically disappeared from the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers. The space in newspapers for non-war related news was miniscule as people were desperate for any information about what was happening on the Western Front. Crime news, therefore, took a back seat and only the most shocking of cases made it into the newspapers. Consequently, journalists reported the basic details of the crime in question and medical testimony was too much of a frippery to include. Additionally, no paternal child killers were found guilty but insane in this period which further reduced the scope for discussion of mental illness in the newspaper coverage.

In the 1920s, mental illness and criminal culpability were once again included in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers. However, there was a change in the language used by journalists to describe mental illness. There was less focus on legal terminology, and medical testimony and ideas were given more space in newspaper articles in the 1920s than in the newspaper coverage of cases in the first sub-sample (for the period 1900 to July 1914) even though lay understandings were still preferred. In the period 1930 to 1939, more use was made of medical language used to discuss mental illness but this did not necessarily follow the latest medical thinking regarding the causes of mental illness. This was due to a number of factors. Firstly, mental illness and criminal culpability still had to be understandable to the average national newspaper reader. Although psychology was becoming more popular in the early twentieth century this rarely translated into medical testimony or reports on cases of paternal child killing. Secondly, medical experts gave testimony using language they thought would be most understandable to lay witnesses and

judges as they were the ones who had to use this information when reaching a verdict and sentencing the defendant. Finally, journalists had to use concepts and terminology they themselves understood and they had to report the case in terms likely to be understood by their readers. Over the period 1900 to 1939 there was more space in the newspaper articles given to medical understandings, more room for medical terminology, and an increased desire for this information.

The newspaper coverage of cases in the sample revealed the centrality of economic provision to explanations of paternal child killing, fatherhood and masculinity. The proportion of unemployed men in each sub-sample increased across the period 1900 to 1939. Unsurprisingly, it was in the period 1930 to 1939 that the highest percentage of unemployed men (28 per cent of the sub-sample) was reported. Yet, a significant amount of the men in the previous three sub-samples were reported to be unemployed, ranging from 15 to 17 per cent of cases. It was not just the fear of poverty that seemed to cause mental breakdown in fathers and was used to explain the murder of their children, as Cathryn Wilson and Jade Shepherd have argued, but any financial loss or change in financial circumstances. The pressure to provide could be very destructive. Paternal child killing was the antithesis of fatherly behaviour but it was also an example of carrying out fatherly duties to their ultimate conclusion. The newspaper coverage also provided evidence of other fatherly behaviour other than economic provision. This included affectionate behaviour, protection, and playing with children. More often than not paternal child killers were presented as caring family men, not previously brutal or violent. In emphasising the good behaviour of these men, it made the killing of their children more shocking and more likely to be viewed as the act of someone who was insane. When a prior record of violent behaviour was emphasised in the newspaper coverage this served to show that the crime was expected and a natural conclusion to a violent past.

Cases of paternal child killing as reported in this selection of national newspapers shed light on the development of the national press over a 40-year period. The early twentieth century saw the development of tabloid journalism which not only changed how news was reported but what kind of news was reported. The format of newspaper articles changed over time and this was reflected in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killing. There was an increased use of specific headlines and columns to make the newspapers accessible to readers and allow them to follow a story. The tone and content of articles also changed. Before the First World War elements of the killing were a central feature of articles but during the First World War and the 1920s this virtually disappeared. In the First World War articles also became shorter due to the scarcity of space available to non-war news so contextual material had to be removed from the articles. Additionally, reading about men killing their children was not particularly morale-boosting to those on the Home or Western front. However, by the 1930s, the way in which child victims were killed once again took on a central role in the newspaper coverage of paternal child killers. By this time the First World War was far enough in the past and graphic depictions of violent crimes sold newspapers. With so many potential news stories vying for attention journalists had to include those details they thought would be of interest to their readers.

Although public appetite for gore diminished during and immediately after the First World War, it returned in the 1930s. This was not solely a product of news reporting; during the 1930s detective fiction was popular and there was obvious monetary potential in using this genre to frame newspaper reports of violent crimes. Newspaper articles relating to cases of paternal child killing became shorter over the period but they remained a staple of the English national press throughout the period 1900 to 1939. Coverage of cases of paternal child killing became less sensational over the period 1900 to 1939. The most sensational cases were in the first sub-sample, despite John Carter Wood characterising the

1920s and 1930s as the 'golden age of sensationalism'.<sup>732</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s there were other more interesting crimes, news stories, and world events taking place all of which were competing for space in newspapers, sometimes at the expense of paternal child killing. There was a delicate balance of factors which led to a case ending up in the national press and receiving extended coverage: an element of the unusual, violence, mystery, social class and occupation, and other events happening at the same time.

Historians have underestimated the extent to which army service prior to the First World War had an impact on mental health. In the first sub-sample (1900 to July 1914) it was reported that in 10 per cent of cases the accused man had either been in the army or was serving at the time he killed his child. The newspaper coverage also demonstrated that there was a general understanding that army service changed men and could damage their mental health. The change in their mental health was often attributed to a further reason, such as heat stroke or grief, but army service was mentioned alongside these other mitigating factors. In the newspaper coverage of cases in the post-First World War sub-samples (1919 to 1929 and 1930 to 1939) there was also evidence that the army service of ex-soldiers was used to explain why these men killed their children. In the third sub-sample it was reported in 30 per cent of cases that the accused man had been in the army and in 7 per cent of cases in the fourth sub-sample. It served as a mitigating factor and not just in the immediate post-war aftermath but up until 1935. Both Ginger Frost and Daniel Grey have discussed the impact of army service on the treatment of child murder by ex-soldiers. Frost argued that it had less bearing on the sentencing of men who murdered their children and their treatment in the press as the war moved further into the past. Grey contended that the mental health implications of army service were not fully acknowledged in the newspaper coverage. Other aspects of the impact of army service were picked up on, such as syphilis and how this affected the sanity of the ex-soldier. Frost and Grey only examined

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<sup>732</sup> J. Carter Wood, *"The Most Remarkable Woman in England": Poison, Celebrity, and the Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press: Manchester and New York, 2012), p. 68.

three cases of ex-soldiers between them in their studies so it is not enough to make concrete judgements about their treatment in the courts and the press. This study enhances their work by using a larger sample of cases. There is strong evidence to suggest that ex-soldiers who killed their children 'benefitted' from their war service almost twenty years after the First World War. However, the findings presented in this thesis would be supported by a further study focussed on the treatment by the press and the courts of other ex-soldiers who committed violent crimes, such as other kinds of murder, domestic abuse, or interpersonal violence.

There is also strong evidence in the cases analysed for this thesis to suggest that paternal child killers were likely to commit suicide, or attempt to commit suicide, after killing their children. Sometimes this was out of shame for what they had done. Sometimes it would appear that this was always part of their plan. Other times, men could not bear to live but could not bear to leave the children unprotected in the world either. Consequently, there was also a connection between suicide, paternal child killing, and mental illness. In 20 per cent of cases in the whole sample it was reported that the paternal child killer had committed suicide and in another 11 per cent of cases a suicide attempt had been made. Paternal child killers who committed suicide were often found to be temporarily insane by coroners but their mental health was not discussed in any depth in the newspaper coverage. This was partly due to the stigma surrounding mental illness and the fact that other factors that could be used to explain the case. It was also because cases of suicide produced a finite amount of information on which journalists could write articles so mental health took a back seat unless the case was of a particularly shocking or unusual nature.

There are several implications of the research carried out for this thesis. The method of newspaper analysis used in this thesis could be applied to other violent crimes committed in the twentieth century and their treatment in the national press in the absence of 'official' documents such as court and medical records. It is a valid way to explore cases of violent

crime in the early twentieth century because it allows access to public perceptions of crime and gives an indication of the types of crimes newspaper journalists and editors were interested in reporting on. There also needs to be more work done on popular understandings of mental illness, especially in the early twentieth century. More crimes could be looked at that resulted in findings of guilty but insane to examine what kind of information regarding mental illness and criminal culpability was being reported in the newspaper coverage.

This thesis also has research implications regarding the treatment of modern day cases of paternal child killing. There needs to be a change in the way in which masculinity is talked about and the pressures put on men to live up to damaging expectations. Equally, there needs to be more done to hold men accountable for their behaviour and not place blame on circumstances or the behaviour of their wives and partners. By giving a greater platform to the implications of concepts such as 'toxic masculinity' it can help to ensure that these types of crimes do not happen in the first place. Jade Shepherd has drawn attention to the fact that the struggles fathers face today are not products of the twenty-first century.<sup>733</sup> Since the second half of the nineteenth century it appears that some fathers have struggled with the pressures placed upon them. This thesis has illustrated that these struggles were unabated in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>733</sup> J. Shepherd, 'Victorian Madman: Broadmoor, Masculinity and the Experiences of the Criminally Insane, 1863-1900' (Unpublished PhD Thesis: Queen Mary University of London, 2013), p. 317.

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## **Appendices**

### *Appendix 1: Headings used in main Excel database*

<b>Heading</b>	<b>Information</b>
Name of accused	Forename and surname
Age of accused	Age
Occupation of accused	Occupation
Employment status of accused	Employed/unemployed/uncertain
Type of housing accused lived in	Type of housing
Address of accused	Address
Was the accused an ex-soldier	Yes/no
Number of children in family	Number
Marital status	Married/single/had a partner/widowed/separated
Nationality of accused	Nationality
Date of first newspaper report	Year
Date child went missing	Year
Location crime committed	Name of city/town/village
Country child killed in	Country
Number of child victims	Number
Gender of child victims	Male/female/both
Age of child victims	Age
Legitimacy of child victims	Legitimate/illegitimate/step-child/adopted child
Did accused kill wife	Yes/no/attempted
Were any other victims killed	Yes/no
Were the child victims insured	Yes/no
Did the case go to the Old Bailey	Yes/no
Was mental illness mentioned	Yes/no - if yes, description
Was medical testimony reported	Yes/no - if yes, description
Did accused commit suicide	Yes/no/attempted
Motive as reported by the press	Motive
Was alcohol involved	Yes/no
Were the NSPCC involved	Yes/no
Was the accused indicted with his partner	Yes/no
What was the method of killing	Method
What was the murder weapon	Weapon
Did the accused display emotion	Yes/no - if yes, description
Was the accused an affectionate father	Yes/no - if yes, description
What kind of relationship did the accused have with his partner/wife	Good/bad - description
Did accused admit allegation	Yes/no
What crime was accused charged with	Crime
What was the verdict	Verdict
Was the accused found guilty of the original charge	Yes/no - if no, then what
Was the accused recommended to mercy	Yes/no - if yes, description
What did the accused plead	Plea
What punishment did the accused receive	Punishment
What crime was the mother charged with	Crime
What was the verdict for the mother	Verdict
What punishment did the mother receive	Punishment
What was the length of the jury's deliberation	Time
Were any judge's comments reported?	Yes/no - if yes, description
What was the coroner's verdict	Verdict
Any other relevant information	Information

*Appendix 2: Headings used in SPSS database*

Heading	Information
Age of accused	Age
Occupation of the accused	Occupation
Employment status	Employed/unemployed/uncertain
Was the accused an ex-soldier	Yes/no
Marital status	Married/single/had a partner/widowed/separated
Type of housing accused lived in	Type of housing
Location crime committed	Name of city/town/village
Country child killed in	Country
Nationality of accused	Nationality
Number of children in family	Number
Number of child victims	Number
Age of child victims	Age
Gender of child victims	Male/female/both
Legitimacy of child victims	Legitimate/illegitimate/step-child/adopted child
Did accused kill wife	Yes/no/attempted
Were any other victims killed	Yes/no
Were the child victims insured	Yes/no
What was the method of killing	Method
What was the murder weapon	Weapon
Were the NSPCC involved	Yes/no
Was the accused indicted with his partner	Yes/no
Motive as reported by the press	Motive
Was alcohol involved	Yes/no
Was mental illness mentioned	Yes/no - if yes, description
Was medical testimony reported	Yes/no - if yes, description
Did accused commit suicide	Yes/no/attempted
Did the accused display emotion	Yes/no - if yes, description
Was the accused an affectionate father	Yes/no - if yes, description
What kind of relationship did the accused have with his partner/wife	Good/bad - description
Did accused admit allegation	Yes/no
What crime was accused charged with	Crime
What was the verdict	Verdict
Was the accused found guilty of the original charge	Yes/no - if no, then what
Was the accused recommended to mercy	Yes/no - if yes, description
What did the accused plead	Plea
What punishment did the accused receive	Punishment
What crime was the mother charged with	Crime
What was the verdict for the mother	Verdict
What punishment did the mother receive	Punishment
What was the length of the jury's deliberation	Time
Were any judge's comments reported?	Yes/no - if yes, description
What was the coroner's verdict	Verdict